



REVIEWS 2017



AHP 45



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གནམ་པོ་གཡུ་ཅེ

COVERS: Phyug mtsho Lake ཕུག་མཚོ། (photograph by Mgon po མགོན་པོ།) and Gnyan po g.yu rtse Mountain གནམ་པོ་གཡུ་ཅེ། (photograph by 'Jam dbyangs skyabs འཇམ་དབང་སྐུངས།) in Gcig sgril གཅིག་སྒྲིལ། County, Mgo log མགོ་ལོག་ Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྔོན། Province, China are depicted on the front and back covers, respectively. Both photographs were taken in 2015.

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*ASIAN HIGHLANDS PERSPECTIVES*

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*Asian Highlands Perspectives (AHP)* is a trans-disciplinary journal focusing on the Tibetan Plateau and surrounding regions, including the Southeast Asian Massif, Himalayan Massif, the Extended Eastern Himalayas, the Mongolian Plateau, and other contiguous areas. The editors believe that cross-regional commonalities in history, culture, language, and socio-political context invite investigations of an interdisciplinary nature not served by current academic forums. *AHP* contributes to the regional research agendas of Sinologists, Tibetologists, Mongolists, and South and Southeast Asianists, while also forwarding theoretical discourse on grounded theory, interdisciplinary studies, and collaborative scholarship.

*AHP* publishes occasional monographs and essay collections both in hardcopy (ISSN 1835-7741) and online (ISSN 1925-6329). The online version is an open access source, freely available at <https://goo.gl/JOeYnq>. The print edition is available to libraries and individuals at-cost through print on demand publisher Lulu.com at <https://goo.gl/rIT9lI>. The journal currently has a core editorial team of four members and a consultative editorial board of twenty-five experts from a variety of disciplines. All submissions to the journal are peer-reviewed by the editorial board and independent, anonymous assessors.

*AHP* welcomes submissions from a wide range of scholars with an interest in the area. Given the dearth of current knowledge on this culturally complex area, we encourage submissions that contain descriptive accounts of local realities - especially by authors from communities in the Asian Highlands - as well as theory-oriented articles. We publish items of irregular format - long articles, short monographs, photo essays, fiction, auto-ethnography, etc. Authors receive a PDF version of their published work. Potential contributors are encouraged to consult previous issues.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

REVIEW: *YESTERDAY'S TRIBE*

Kelsang Norbu (Skal bzang nor bu སྐལ་བཟང་ནོར་བུ,  
Gesang Nuobu 格桑诺布)



Bstan pa yar rgyas བསྐལ་པ་ཡར་རྒྱལ།. 2014. *Kha sang gi tsho ba ཁ་སང་གི་ཚོ་བ།* [*Yesterday's Tribe*]. Zi ling ཟེ་ལིང་།: Mtsho ngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang མཚོ་ལྷོ་མི་རིགས་དཔེ་སྐྱད་ཁང་། [Mtsho ngon Nationalities Press]. 259pp. ISBN 978-7-5420-2375-9 (paperback 30RMB).

Bstan pa yar rgyas (b. 1962) was reared in a pastoral household in Byang thang (Changthang), Nag chu (Naqu) Prefecture, in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). A member of the China Writers Association and the Association of Ethnographic Photography, Bstan pa yar rgyas is currently employed by the Creation and Research Team of the TAR's Song and Dance Troupe. During his youth, he heard various folk narratives such as the Ge sar Epic from his uncle. He began school at the age of ten and became a teacher in Nag chu in 1981. In 1984, he enrolled in Tibet University where he started the student magazine, *Zla zer 'New Moon'*. In 1989, he returned to Nag chu as a teacher. In 1990, he shifted his work to the Nag chu Cultural Bureau where he conducted local ethnographic research and collected folklore and songs. In 1995, he became the chief editor of the local magazine *Byang thang*. In 2003, he moved to his current job.

A prolific writer in both Tibetan and Chinese, Bstan pa yar rgyas's first novel, *Khrag gi zags ma mkha' la 'phyo ba'i gangs ri dmar po'* 'A Red Snow Mountain Spraying Drops of Blood Towards the Sky', written in Tibetan, was serialized in *Tibet Culture and Art* from 1988 to 2000. In 2005, an offprint of this novel was republished as *Distant Nomad Tent*.<sup>1</sup>

Kelsang Norbu. 2017. Review: *Yesterday's Tribe*. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 45:9-15.

<sup>1</sup><https://goo.gl/oGsRR9>, accessed 27 August 2016.

Bstan pa yar rgyas's rich experiences and attachment to the local culture serve as his greatest inspirations for writing. Reviews of Bstan pa yar rgyas's earlier writings include Robin (2009-2010: 37-38):

*The Faraway Tent...* narrates the conflict among rival pastoral tribes in an unspecified past (possibly at the turn of the 20th century), through the turbulent destinies of Wangchen (Dbang chen), his second wife Omakyi ('O ma skyid), and his son Dradül (Dgra 'dul). Interspersed with well-rendered ethnological descriptions of nomadic folk culture with a focus on hunting and fighting, proverbs, and songs, it documents very satisfactorily the little-known life of Changthang (Byang thang) tribes before 1950. Its author, himself from a nomadic background in Nag chu, has a thorough inside knowledge of these communities and is a committed writer who regularly publishes realist fiction set in his native region, as well as ethnographic material that has become extremely precious as the nomadic way of life of the Changthang is doomed to undergo drastic changes within the next years.

Virtanen provides similar comments (2008: 244):

Most writings by Tenpa Yargyé deal with the life of the people of the Byang thang or Northern Plain, the high, cold region north of Lhasa where the vast majority of the population is engaged in nomadism. Foremost is the recently published novel *Thag ring gi sbra nag* (A distant nomad tent), also set in the Northern Plain and depicting the life of hunters. The main characters, Wangchen and his son Drandül, have left their home village and are wandering in the hostile and cold high plateau. They get their food by hunting. The culture of the hunters, their customs, beliefs, and songs, is described in naturalistic detail. The novel also contains hunting scenes and descriptions of taking revenge on enemies.

Neither of these summaries critically review the writer's work.

The author's most recent novel, *Yesterday's Tribe*, won the Junma Award.<sup>1</sup> Told in the third person and with striking similarities

<sup>1</sup> "One of the four biggest national-level literary awards in China, Junma is

to *A Distant Nomad Tent, Yesterday's Tribe* begins with a coming of age ritual for Rdo 'bum, a thirteen-year-old boy. Like his teenage peers who grow up on the Byang thang, Rdo 'bum is eager to be accepted as a man.

Chos dpal, the boy's father and head of a local tribe, fastens a red tassel to his son's braid, indicating that this young nomad's dream has now been realized, and tells him that he is no longer a youngster and must not shed tears. Instead, it is time he shouldered a real man's responsibilities and bravely faced all challenges: protecting the family's property - yaks and sheep, and the vast grassland upon which the family's wealth rests.

Bandits stealing livestock, fights between communities and tribes, and ferocious revenge attacks are common. Consequently, wealthy families must have the necessary manpower and arms to maintain their power and influence over others.

Rdo 'bum and his brother herd animals during a solar eclipse, after which the family realizes some of their yaks have been stolen. A "real man" should bring the stolen yaks back. This offers the opportunity for a man to prove himself, but there is also the possibility of danger. For a mother, wife, or sister, a man's pursuit of bandits is worrying.

No traces of the yaks are discovered and the pursuers return empty-handed, but not in total defeat. While chasing the bandits, they killed three, including the bandit leader, and captured six alive.

This violence to the bandits prepares the reader for the captives to be severely punished. Surprisingly, they are treated humanely. *Bla ma* are invited to conduct funerals for the deceased, a doctor treats the wounded, and food is generously offered to the others. When the tribe chiefs learn that these robbers are also "victims" - two new bandit gang members deceived them and disappeared with the stolen animals - the tribesmen's hatred towards these "victims" lessens. There is even sorrow and criticism in the tribe for what is seen as the unnecessary

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the premier award for literary works among ethnic minority groups" (<https://goo.gl/rzbdiF>, accessed 24 August 2016).

killing of the bandit head, who in death, has earned a certain respect for his bravery.

Through such conundrums, the writer seems to be maintaining a respect for human kindness and respect for human life. There is stealing, there is fighting, there is robbery and looting, and there is revenge killing. Yet, these Plateau nomads show respect for nature and life. For example, during the night attack on the bandits' tents, the chief of the pursuers repeatedly tells his men to avoid unnecessary killing. When wildlife such as antelope are hunted for subsistence, the hunters pray, expressing regret for taking lives. This duality derives from their need to survive as well as a strong faith in Buddhism.

In this reality-based fiction, the author provides rich narratives of life on the Byang thang, such as how a tribe is formed and maintained by a network of relatives and marriage, the generally harmonious relationship between master and servant, wedding and funeral rituals, summer horseraces, and polyandry, which is a well-accepted practice in the area. Detailed descriptions of what I have just listed provide a wealth of ethnographic materials.

One incident seems out of place, however, in this novel grounded in reality: a group of hunters chases and shoots at wildlife, which they plan to eat. This disturbs a meditating hermit, who warns one of the hunters and then flies away like a vulture!

The plot follows a simple storyline of chasing bandits and searching for stolen yaks by tribesmen. While it has certain details in the first half or so, the story becomes rushed towards the end with fewer details. The narrative ends without a climax.

The last chapter, "Conspiracy," is a particular disappointment: tribe leaders decide to purchase guns and ammunition from Muslim traders to better protect their grassland. The payment is generous. It includes thousands of lambskins, dozens of musk deer glands, dozens of deer antlers, hundreds of fox and lynx skins, thousands of silver coins, and numerous yak tails. The trading proceeds smoothly with the two sides exchanging gifts and expressing interest in future cooperation in business, despite the herders' discomfort with the way the alien visitors slaughter livestock for their food.

After enjoying the herders' generous hospitality, the traders depart with the goods they have received and eventually pitch their tents when it comes time to rest. *Bang! Bang!* Gunshots ring out. The traders poke their heads out of their tents to figure out what is happening. They soon lose their lives in an attack by the nomads they have just traded with.

This is a real *conspiracy*! But then there comes a simple question: who are the schemers? Readers may be confused in trying to answer this.

From the storyline's simple logic, it was the Tibetan herders who betrayed the merchants, which contradicts the sense the novel has established up to this point and ruins the theme of the herders' morality - the humane characteristics in the hearts of these Plateau inhabitants.

Besides the unsatisfying conclusion, there are other details that the author treats without adequate attention. The lost yaks and the two bandits who deceived their fellow bandits are mentioned several times as the story unfolds, but simply no longer exist at the end.

Another incomplete side story is why the tribe purchases sophisticated arms from the Muslim traders. Supposedly it is to expel the well-equipped "bandits" and their large numbers of yaks and horses who trespass on their tribal grassland. These outsiders even steal the tribe's yaks. While readers expect a brutal revenge on the bandits with the newly-gained, advanced weapons, nothing happens. These shortcomings illustrate how the author might have given more careful thought to plot development.

In terms of character creation, the author gives only vague images using direct description or dialogue about the main characters' attributes. Details such as their age, likes and dislikes, let alone their internal world, remain ambiguous. This prevents the reader from having more than a superficial impression of the leading characters.

The time the novel is set in is also unclear. It is hard to guess the specific time of *yesterday* in which the tribe lives. There are a few clues, e.g., firelock rifles, the arrival of more advanced guns, a trader's pocket watch that greatly interests the herders, and the herders' first

experience of choking on spicy chilies brought by Muslim traders. These clues point to the first half of the twentieth century.

This lack of clarity in time is something Virtanen (2008:244) notes:

While reading *A Distant Nomad Tent* I could not at first determine when the events were taking place. Only toward the end of the narrative is there a clue: as Wangchen's son Drandül joins the Tibetan troops on their way to oppose the intruders, there is a mention of the British armed mission to Tibet, which was commanded by Colonel Francis Younghusband in 1903-4. Thus the book is set in a period when man was very much part of nature, void of modern technology (except guns).

This story will not sit well with those most comfortable with "old Tibet" (pre-1950) depicted as a bleak, backward, and savage society of exploitation and oppression by the landed gentry - exploiters and enemies of the people. With a large dose of human compassion, *Yesterday's Tribe* depicts life with more nuance. This, and the rich description of highland culture, constitutes this novel's special value. Readers seeking to learn more about local customs in Nag chu and how it includes and excludes the exercise of human morality - depending on the context and the reader's interpretation - will find this novel rewarding.

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- Virtanen, Riika J. 2008. *Development and Urban Space in Contemporary Tibetan Literature* in Luran R Hartley and Patricia Schiaffini-Vedani (eds) *Modern Tibetan Literature and Social Change*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 236-262.

## NON-ENGLISH TERMS

bla ma བླ་མ།

bstan pa yar rgyas, Tenpa Yargyé བསྐྱེད་པ་ཡར་རྒྱལ།

byang thang བྱང་ཐང་།

chos dpal ཆོས་དཔལ།

ge sar གེ་སར།

Gesang Nuobu 格桑诺布

Junma 骏马

kha sang gi tsho ba ཁ་སང་གི་ཚོ་བ།

khrag gi zegs ma mkha' la 'phyo ba'i gangs ri dmar po ཁྲག་གི་ཟེགས་མ་མཁའ་ལ་འཕྱེ་བའི་གངས་རི་དམར་པོ།

འཕྱེ་བའི་གངས་རི་དམར་པོ།

nag chu ནག་ཆུ།

Naqu 那曲

rdo 'bum རྡོ་འབུམ།

skal bzang nor bu སྐལ་བཟང་ནོར་བུ།

thag ring gi sbra nag ཐག་རིང་གི་སྤྲ་ནག།

zla zer ལྷ་ཟེར།

REVIEW: *MY TWO FATHERS*

Reviewed by Sangs rgyas bkra shis སངས་རྒྱལ་བཀྲ་ཤིས། (Duke University)



Tshe ring don 'grub. 2014. ཆོ་རིང་དོན་འགྲུབ། Nga yi a pha gnyis ང་ཡི་ཨ་ཕ་གཉིས། [*My Two Fathers*]. Zi ling ཟི་ལིང་། Mthso sngon mi rigs dpe skrin khang མཚོ་སྔོན་མི་རིགས་དཔེ་སླེབ་ཁང་། [Mthso sngon Nationalities Press]. 267 pp. ISBN 978-7-5420-2359-9 (paperback 31RMB)

Tshe ring don 'grub, officially classified as a Mongolian, was born 13 October 1961 in Sog (Henan) Mongolian Autonomous County, Rma lho (Huangnan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province. He herded livestock until he was thirteen and then attended school where he studied Tibetan and Chinese for about eight years. Afterwards, he became a middle school teacher. Since early retirement in 2013, he has specialized in literary creation. Several of his short stories, novellas, and novels, written originally in Tibetan, have been translated into Mongolian, English, French, German, Japanese, Swedish, and Hungarian. Some have been used as textbooks in Tibetan and Mongolian areas.<sup>1</sup>

Btsun po don 'grub (2014:231-236) comments that Tshe ring don 'grub uses his personal experiences to represent ordinary people's lives in Tibetan herding areas in A mdo. While summarizing publications about Tshe ring don 'grub's literary works, Btsun po don 'grub also describes Tshe ring don 'grub's family, education, and work experiences; the uniqueness of his writings and how he has been influenced by other writers. Btsun po don 'grub (2014:6) notes that the first analytical paper written in Tibetan about Tshe ring don 'grub's stories was *Bde zhing yangs pa'i lam chen zhig* 'A Big Wide Happy Road' by Skal bzang don grub, which was published by *Sbrang char* 'Light Rain' in 1985. Btsun po don 'grub lists thirty-nine Tibetan, three

Sangs rgyas bkra shis. 2017. Review: *My Two Fathers*. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 45:16-38.

<sup>1</sup> The author provided this information to me through WeChat in April 2016.

Chinese, and two English articles about Tshe ring don 'grub's stories, collectively indicative of his stature in the world of modern Tibetan literature.

Tshe ring don 'grub's works have also been noticed outside of China. For example, Lama Jabb (2015:225) reports that in 2012, Tshe ring don 'grub expressed admiration for writers such as Charles Dickens, Victor Hugo, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, George Orwell, and Salman Rushdie whose works he had read in Chinese translation. Robin (2009-2010:39-40) describes Tshe ring don 'grub as an experienced, radical, and productive Tibetan author with a decided irreverence for religion and tradition. Earlier, Hartley and Pema Bhum (2001:59) described his writing as "biting satire of social corruption and pettiness" and wielding "literary talents to cut through the muck of samsara and expose the hypocrisy of individuals as well as the wounds of social ills."

Interestingly, Tshe ring don 'grub's works have lacked appeal to a Mongolian readership. Yangdon Dhondup (2002:234) explains this rejection:

His [Tshe ring don 'grub's] explanation for this rejection was that his works revolve entirely around a Tibetan lifestyle and was therefore too remote for the Mongolian-speaking readership. ... Tsering Dondup summed up the situation of the people from Sogpo when he said: 'My bones are Mongolian, but I've spent my whole life speaking Tibetan, and all I've ever known has been Tibetan culture.'

The narrator of *My Two Fathers* is Bla ma skyabs, whose name appears only at the novel's end. The story is divided into three parts, each having twenty-five chapters, and is told in a series of flashbacks. In this review, I have rearranged events to make the novel easier for the reader to understand. Although the relationship between the narrator's (Bla ma skyabs) two fathers is clarified only at the end of the story, I want to make this clear now: the narrator's biological father is Ting 'dzin, who did not know he had a son for many years. Bsam 'phel, the narrator's second father, married the narrator's mother and cared

for the narrator throughout his life. I will explain this unusual relationship in more detail later.

The story begins with vivid description of the two fathers' different physical features and personalities. Bsam 'phel has very small eyes, is reticent, and exudes quiet honesty that often attracts women. In contrast, handsome Ting 'dzin has large eyes and is talkative. Bsam 'phel and Ting 'dzin were neighbors, grew up together, ate together, were so attached to each other that they slept under one sheepskin quilt, and herded jointly.

However, their respective families had very different backgrounds in terms of politics and finances. Ting 'dzin's father, Byams pa, was the only local government employee, the only local with a wristwatch and a radio, and was very devoted to the Communist Party. Byams pa believed that the most glorious act was to love Communism and venerate Chairman Mao. These beliefs paved his way to obtaining a government job, good horses, and rifles which he used to hunt antelope, blue sheep, and spotted deer.

Byams pa agrees that his son should attend school in order to eventually become a government employee. However, when Ting 'dzin finishes junior middle school, Byams pa advises:

Now you don't need to go to school. Look at me - I can barely read the Tibetan alphabet, but I am a leader of government employees. The most important thing to do is to be sincere and faithful to the Party. Don't you want to soon have excellent guns and great horses quickly? (7)

Nevertheless, Ting 'dzin continues to attend school.

In contrast, Bsam 'phel is from an ordinary family that suffered a great deal during the Cultural Revolution. Bsam 'phel's father had clandestinely gone to Lha ris Mountain one dark night to get medicinal water for his ill son. Heavy rain and fog meant that he was unable to return home until the next morning. Before he reached his home, government employees noticed he had a container of water and surmised he had been to fetch medicinal water. He was then charged

with engaging in superstitious activity, blacklisted, and punished for the crime of stealing government property - the medicinal water.

When Bsam 'phel hears that Ting 'dzin is attending school, he runs to his father and implores him to allow him to attend with his friend. His father refuses, leaving Bsam 'phel sad and lonely.

Bsam 'phel is fascinated by Ting 'dzin's engrossing stories about school, his blue school uniform, Young Pioneer<sup>1</sup> Red Scarf, and black shoes with plastic soles. Bsam 'phel has never seen or heard of such things and his desire to go to school intensifies. He and his mother repeatedly entreat his father to allow him to go to school. Finally exhausted by their entreaties, the father agrees, though he still can see no value in attending.

Ting 'dzin is delighted when he learns that Bsam 'phel will attend school, partly because older students bully him. Each time a new student enrolls in the school, some older students come out, one after another, from their dormitory rooms and glare at the new students, intimidating them, and even cruelly beating them. For example, on Bsam 'phel's first day at school, Thick Mouth Bsam 'grub, who often bullies Ting 'dzin, comes and gives each new student a nickname, such as Black-as-a-Pot and Cunt Mouth, and a hard slap.

Thick Mouth Bsam 'grub approaches Bsam 'phel, who is sitting on his bed, and exclaims in surprise, "A tsi! Are there really such small eyes like yours in the world? No! Those are not eyes but assholes" (26). Just as he is about to deliver a slap, Bsam 'phel kicks Thick Mouth Bsam 'grub's scrotum with his leather shoes, sending his tormentor tumbling to the floor, writhing in agony, biting his lower lip, and squeezing his eyes closed. A few minutes later when he is able to move, he grabs at Bsam 'phel's scrotum, whereupon Ting 'dzin hits Bsam 'grub's head twice with a stick. Bsam 'grub then falls unconscious.

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<sup>1</sup> "Pioneers" in this context refers to the Chinese Communist Party's organization for children aged seven to twelve - Little Red Pioneers (Woronov 2007:647). Beginning in the 1950s, June the First in China has been observed as International Children's Day. A day of games, songs, and presentations, it has also been a time, since the early 1980s, for ceremonies inducting the nation's first grade students into the Little Red Pioneers (Woronov 2007:648).

Ting 'dzin and Bsam 'phel are taken to school on the back of yaks or horses. When ready to return home, they wait by the road, asking passing drivers for a lift. Sometimes they must walk home.

Bsam 'phel loves Children's Day because everybody wears new clothes and new shoes, receives candy and various food that they generally have only during Lo sar 'Tibetan New Year', participate in related singing and dancing events, and watch movies at night. Importantly, Young Pioneer members have red scarves tied around their necks and together sing "We are the heirs of Communism."

Once on Children's Day, when the students are singing, "We are the heirs of Communism," Stobs ldan, the knowledgeable, kind, and humorous school vice-headmaster laughs, and comments that it is surprising that the heirs of Communism have arrived while Communism has not. Soon after, Stobs ldan is jailed for this remark and two years later he becomes the school's swine caretaker.

In the winter, all the students receive winter clothes, except for Bsam 'phel and three other students whose families are also blacklisted. Reflecting on this situation, Bsam 'phel can find no reason for his family's political classification, other than the incident of his father fetching medicinal water from Lha ris Mountain and an uncle who opposed putting his family's property in a communal warehouse. The uncle had been subsequently incarcerated and, in 1958, he died in prison. Bsam 'phel hates this uncle and wishes there was a way he could erase this relationship so that he can better fit in and find a government job when he graduates.

The blacklisting means that no matter how excellent his school marks, Bsam 'phel will never receive a red scarf nor a school uniform. Discouraged and marginalized, Bsam 'phel concludes that he can never become a government employee no matter how hard he studies. At the same time, his father encourages him to return home and scolds that he should never have attended school in the first place.

Meanwhile, Ting 'dzin obtains a Young Pioneer scarf and joins the Young Pioneers.

When Stobs ldan hears that Bsam 'phel and Ting 'dzin have been promoted based on their good study results, he asks them to visit

his room. He lends them books that he has hidden in the ceiling and teaches them privately, warning them to keep the books a secret.

Stobs ldan explains that the purpose of attending school is neither to receive new clothes nor a red scarf, but to learn new and useful knowledge. Though Bsam 'phel and Ting 'dzin are unable to precisely identify what that is, they find something admirable and respectful about Stobs ldan. They study the Ge sar Epic, Tibetan history, Tibetan grammar, and various Chinese books under Stobs ldan's tutelage.

After Ting 'dzin and Bsam 'phel finish junior middle school, they are at a loss. Ting 'dzin wants to continue his schooling, while Bsam 'phel comments that attending school when teachers will not come to class regularly is a waste of time. Instead, he expresses a desire to be a primary school teacher if his family can solve the political classification problem.

They consult Stobs ldan, who urges them to continue to go to school. He promises to introduce them to some of his friends at senior middle school who can help them.

Bsam 'phel and Ting 'dzin attend the prefecture nationalities school where the food is terrible and where their nice clothes are stolen

After the Cultural Revolution, Stobs ldan is invited to teach students whose families had political classification problems so that they can receive their diplomas. Everything is changing.

Stobs ldan writes to a responsible teacher, 'Phags pa thar, and asks him to take care of Bsam 'phel and Ting 'dzin. 'Phags pa thar then often brings bread to Ting 'dzin and Bsam 'phel. When the lights are turned off in the classroom, the two boys go to 'Phags pa thar's room and study. They are the hardest working students in the class. Their head teacher orders them to help the lower level students with their study.

Bsam 'phel helps Kun bzang lha mo, who one day suddenly puts her arms around Bsam 'phel, sobs quietly, and confides that her family sent her to her groom's home a month earlier. Meanwhile, her husband visits his girlfriend every night and viciously scolds Kun bzang lha mo, who soon stops attending school.

Many students cheat on the examinations and consequently, Bsam 'phel and Ting 'dzin do not earn scores that are higher than others, which discourages them from caring about exam marks. They do, however, read whatever materials they can find. After reading a great deal, Bsam 'phel hones an ability to analyze ideas carefully.

Bsam 'phel's lack of interest in math and school activities angers his head teacher. When Bsam 'phel tells the teacher how wrong the school education system is, the head teacher suggests to the school that Bsam 'phel should be expelled for his arrogance.

Ting 'dzin is the leader of the student union and is often busy giving talks. Bsam 'phel suggests that if he really cares about the students, Ting 'dzin should write a letter to the school leaders about improving school food and hygiene. Subsequently, all the students are asked to put a fingerprint on the letter Ting 'dzin writes to the school leaders. This angers the school leaders, who scold Ting 'dzin. However, when they try to replace him as the leader of the student union, the students unite in declaring that if this happens they will leave the school. Consequently, Ting 'dzin retains his position.

Teacher 'Phags pa thar takes Bsam 'phel and Ting 'dzin to his home and shows them his family shrine that features 1,000-year-old copper images, *thang ka*, many volumes of scriptures, and offering bowls filled with pure water. Until now they had only heard of such objects from elders. 'Phags pa thar explains that those sacred objects are from his ancestors and that his family buried them during the Cultural Revolution. Ting 'dzin and Bsam 'phel are keenly interested in these mysterious objects, an interest that leads them to a monastery near the school where many students go to prostrate and circumambulate when final exams are approaching.

Though parts of the monastery buildings were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution, most of the sacred objects inside survived intact. An old monk introduces images of various deities that the two boys had heard elders pray to. Later, the boys often visit the monastery and study with a monk who is an expert on *thang ka* painting, which Bsam 'phel asks the monk to teach him. The monk agrees, but when Bsam 'phel brings an oil painting of a Greek Venus

and says that he wants to combine oil painting and *thang ka* production to create a distinctive Sarasvati,<sup>1</sup> the monk is shocked. He angrily says, "I thought you were a clever young nomad, but you are a lunatic. Don't ever come to me again" (112).

Bsam 'phel and Ting 'dzin both value college life, but believe a college education is something unattainable, especially when they see few students pass the college entrance examinations, despite intense preparations. However, to their surprise they both pass. When Stobs ldan inquires what major they will choose, Bsam 'phel replies that he wants to study education or literature.

"That's a good choice and Ting 'dzin could be good at education and other issues, including politics. This is a difference between you two," Stobs ldan observes (140).

The college is very large with plenty of places to sit and study, including a free library. It is also a place where money can buy anything. The two young men also meet students from agricultural areas who have better Chinese but poor written Tibetan, and students from herding areas who are unable to either read or pronounce Chinese Pinyin correctly.

Bsam 'phel and Ting 'dzin spend most of their time studying, except on weekends when they both write poetry, earning money from publishers that helps to support their lives in school. Bsam 'phel is obsessed with reading and writing poetry and ignores most school activities.

Ting 'dzin, as the leader of the student union, tells Bsam 'phel to join more activities. Bsam 'phel replies that they are not in primary school and college students should have the freedom to do what they want. He then criticizes the school system and urges Ting 'dzin to write about the school's terrible education system.

Ting 'dzin ignores this.

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<sup>1</sup> The goddess, Sarasvati, the Goddess of Learning and the consort of Brahma, is the source of all knowledge. Many students and scholars worship her. She is often depicted sitting on a lotus, symbolizing her foundation in the experience of the Absolute Truth (<http://goo.gl/DWkHSj>, accessed 7 July 2016).

Time passes and they are about to graduate. Bsam 'phel loves his college life. About this time, he recalls that Stobs ldan had told him that many sutras written in silver and gold were in the library, but during the Cultural Revolution, they were burned. Thinking there might be some such books in the library, Bsam 'phel goes to check.

Pa sangs sgrol ma, a librarian, shows Bsam 'phel a basement storehouse. After searching but finding nothing very old nor interesting, Bsam 'phel is disappointed and prepares to leave. Pa sangs sgrol ma then shows him a version of *Jinpingmei* 'The Plum in the Golden Vase', which is at least a hundred years old and features illustrations of various erotic passages. Pa sangs sgrol ma and Bsam 'phel are so stimulated that they embrace, kiss, and have sex.

Pa sangs sgrol ma tells Bsam 'phel that he can take the book with him but he declines, saddened that he could not locate any Tibetan books. Pa sangs sgrol ma insists that since *Jinpingmei* is not on any booklist, he can take it and Bsam 'phel finally agrees. This becomes his most precious possession.

Eventually both Bsam 'phel and Ting 'dzin graduate from college. Ting 'dzin finds a job as a member of a government organization in the county town while Bsam 'phel opts to be a teacher in a nationalities middle school and teaches Tibetan. Ting 'dzin angrily accuses Bsam 'phel of being a fool for wanting to simply be an ordinary teacher, never even dreaming of owning a car.

After some years, Ting 'dzin sees the place where he lives and works as a cemetery and, desperately wanting to live in the city, decides to do a graduate degree.

Meanwhile, Bsam 'phel is often busy with his students at the local nationalities middle school. Painfully aware of how ineffective the education system is, he talks to the headmaster, who replies, "Bad students are always bad no matter how good our education management"(185).

During the same conversation, the headmaster hands Bsam 'phel some application forms for nominating the best teachers in the county. The headmaster wants Bsam 'phel to nominate him in a recommendation letter exaggerating how effective the country

education system is. Bsam 'phel refuses. As punishment, the headmaster orders him to teach more classes, which Bsam 'phel enjoys.

Nevertheless, the heavy workload takes its toll and he collapses in class. His students take him to the hospital where he meets a beautiful nurse, Lha kho, who is so shy that at first she is unable to look at him directly. Bsam 'phel comments that she seems very familiar and Ting 'dzin reminds him that she is their former classmate who often wore a tattered sheepskin robe because her family's political classification meant she was not given a school uniform.

Time passes and Bsam 'phel and Lha kho become so intimate that when she helps him pack the day before he is to be discharged from the hospital, Bsam 'phel asks her where she stays. He adds that he would like to visit her that night. Lowering her head, she gives him her room's address.

Bsam 'phel demonstrates how he will knock on her door at eleven in the evening, and later tells Ting 'dzin about his appointment with the nurse, where she lives, and how he intends to rap on the door.

About twenty minutes before the appointed time, Ting 'dzin is returning home. He suddenly recalls what Bsam 'phel told him. To have some fun, he goes to the nurse's room and raps on the door exactly as Bsam 'phel demonstrated. Lha kho opens the door and races back to her bed without looking. Unable to control his sexual desire, Ting 'dzin has sex with her.

About twenty minutes later, there is another knock on the door. It is Bsam 'phel. Only then does Lha kho realize the man in her bed is Ting 'dzin.

While studying for a graduate degree, Ting 'dzin meets the beautiful daughter of an important government official. She is known as the "School Flower." With her assistance, Ting 'dzin publishes a collection of his poetry for which he receives a payment. He easily composes an MA thesis, which is largely a copy of Ge sar-related materials and some disorganized comments. Given the cultural value assigned the Ge sar epic, no one is willing to say that what he wrote is unacceptable.

Bsam 'phel visits Ting 'dzin's home and chats with Ting 'dzin's father but, as he is an ordinary teacher, everybody considers him a failure and gives him little attention. His friend, Mgon po,<sup>1</sup> advises him to try to become a leading official in the county town, given his connections, but Bsam 'phel refuses.

Bsam 'phel is so concerned about his students that he even looks for them on the weekends in internet-bars and brings them back to school. He is tired of the school headmaster and has little communication with his family, who decides he is possessed by an evil spirit and invites a religious practitioner to perform an exorcism.

One day, Lha kho visits Bsam 'phel, asks about Ting 'dzin's whereabouts, and confides that she is pregnant. Bsam 'phel, feeling sorry for Lha kho and also responsible, believing that he should not have told Ting 'dzin about their appointment, offers to marry her. She agrees. The child is Bla ma skyabs, the narrator of this novel, whose biological father is Ting 'dzin, whom Bsam 'phel does not inform in fear of disturbing his study.

Ting 'dzin is predictably awarded his graduate degree and then arranges for a university position through his connections. He is so frequently invited to meetings that he does little work. When the meeting is about Tibetan traditional culture, he says how important it is and how everyone should learn from it. If the meeting is about Tibetan poetry, he lectures about how Tibetan poetry is the best poetry in the world and how everybody should learn from it.

Later, he marries A mtsho mo, an important surgeon in a large provincial hospital. One day, she complains about a poor patient who

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<sup>1</sup> Mgon po was Ting 'dzin and Bsam 'phel's former classmate who was known for bedwetting. He was known simply as "Bedwetter" and slept on a bunk above Bsam 'phel. "A *ha wo!* 'Father's flesh'! Bedwetter peed on me again!" Bsam 'phel shouts while Mgon po pretends to sleep. "Bedwetter! Get up! Bedwetter needs my fists again," Bsam 'phel bellows at midnight (36). Feeling frustrated and angry, Bsam 'phel and Ting 'dzin tie Mgon po's penis with a wire and Bsam 'phel warns him that he will cut off his penis at the root if he unties it before sunrise. That night, though not one drop of pee falls on Bsam 'phel, Mgon po screams horribly before dawn with a penis so painfully swollen that the wire is no longer visible.

gives presents of lower-than-expected value to the doctors, who then remove only half of the patient's tumor. A mtsho mo also tells Ting 'dzin that they let a patient die because they did not have enough funds to pay for the medical expenses.

Ting 'dzin is shocked and scolds his wife for being heartless. In return, she curses him, and points out that he gives high marks and easy diplomas to students who give him a lot of money. Afterwards, the two are at total odds.

Bsam 'phel reads various books to learn more about the Tibetan education situation, but realizes later that this information is incorrect because money allows people to publish anything. And, without money, even if you write something meaningful and important, nobody cares. Bsam 'phel then visits various areas to research Tibetan education and reaches conclusions that are very different from what he has read.

Bsam 'phel wants to publish his own book but he cannot pay for it, so he asks Ting 'dzin for help. Ting 'dzin suggests that if he lacks influence with the publishers or money he could put a famous writer's name on the book. He adds that nobody cares about a middle school teacher's book and nobody would buy it if it were published. Bsam 'phel suggests that the book be published under both their names and hands his handwritten manuscript to Ting 'dzin, who promises to consider it.

Bsam 'phel also gives his precious *Jinpingmei* to Ting 'dzin, who complains that he cannot be promoted because he needs to bribe his leaders with a lot of money or a valuable relic.

Bsam 'phel returns to his school and soon after starts to feel sick. He becomes progressively thinner. His son goes with him for a health check and the results show that he has only a short time to live. Bsam 'phel dies some days later.

After reading the manuscript, Ting 'dzin admires Bsam 'phel's knowledge and research. When he hears that his friend has died, he recalls Bsam 'phel's suggestion that they be co-authors. But Ting 'dzin thinks:

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Dear Friend Bsam 'phel, now this book can't help you and it can help me a lot. If this is published under your name, it will cost a lot, but if it is published under my name, it will cost less. To realize your dream, I will publish it and publicize it throughout society (247).

Feeling sad that his father died before the book was published, the narrator resolves to realize Bsam 'phel's dream. Then, to his astonishment, he hears a TV announcement that *Tibetan Cultural Education Path* has been published under Ting 'dzin's name. Many scholars take note of the book and some readers wonder about the identity of the real author.

The narrator calls Ting 'dzin and asks if he published his father's book.

Ting 'dzin hangs up. Later he wants to confess, but his wife forbids him to do so.

Bla ma skyabs takes Ting 'dzin to court and produces many records demonstrating that the book was written by his father, Bsam 'phel. Ting 'dzin subsequently loses his job after which nobody wants to help him. Ting 'dzin's wife then forces him to divorce. Later, Ting 'dzin learns that his wife is now dating the leader of the hospital where his wife works.

Ting 'dzin fills out the divorce forms and asks A mthso mo who should care for their daughter. His wife suggests that they leave that decision to their daughter, who informs them that she wants neither of them to care for her, but she does need the family savings, home, and car.

A mtsho mo angrily reproaches, "You are going too far - we took care of you from the time you were an infant to now, paid for your schooling, and made connections to provide you a job. Are you forgetting all of this?" (254)

"I did not ask for any of this - I just borrowed your uterus. It's all what you should do," (254) the daughter replies. A mtsho mo and her daughter quarrel so loudly it seems the house will explode. Ting 'dzin wants to disappear from that place as quickly as possible.

It is the first day of the first lunar month and everybody is celebrating Lo sar 'Tibetan New Year'. Ting 'dzin is the only guest in a big hotel. He recalls the days when he was barefoot on the grassland with Bsam 'phel and the only thing that covered them from their navel to their thigh was sheepskin.

...

This tangled, emotive story reflects the reality of Tibetan youth in Amdo herding areas in the 1980s, a reality that in 2016 has changed little. I would like to comment on the two main characters in terms of the different directions their lives took and their relationship with each other, the local state-sponsored education, Tibetan traditional values and marriage restrictions, violence in schools, sexual encounters, and language.

Ting 'dzin and Bsam 'phel grow up as neighbors and attend school through university together, but later their lives take very different trajectories. Bsam 'phel is honest, direct, and loyal. His life experiences help him comprehend the daunting reality of a society characterized by an ineffective, brutal state education system; personal relationships informed by self-interest; the critical importance of having an official government position that brings power and benefits; and social institutions driven by the profit motive rather than public service.

Bsam 'phel's experiences and observations convince him that a leadership position brings power to manipulate others, but generally not positively. Bsam 'phel is not alone in his understanding of the deficiencies of the education system, which are widely understood, but considered so much a part of an intractable system that they cannot be solved. Inspired by the possibility of developing a quality education system, however elusive, and motivated by a sense of compassion and the prospect of making positive differences, he researches education in Tibetan areas and eventually writes a book on the topic. He has little interest in accumulating money and is oblivious to others' expectations.

Despite having had a number of years of education Bsam 'phel does not live in a city, own a car, nor have an official position with power means. This means that he is generally considered a failure. It

is a telling comment on the reasons locals want their children to attend school - which are to obtain the very things Bsam 'phel rejects.

In contrast, Ting 'dzin is at the center of social activities and, with this as his passion, thinks about little else. He makes a great deal of money, attains a position of leadership with all its benefits and social prestige, and lives in a city, thus earning the admiration of those living in his local community who consider him a model of success, especially since he is one of the very few locals with such achievements. Nevertheless, he loses everything in the end, painfully learning that modern society operates based on who and how you manipulate others for your own benefit.

Despite the stark differences in these two characters, the relationship between Ting 'dzin and Bsam 'phel remains steadfast, based on a shared past in a traditional world where personality creates sincere love, sharing different life moments, a long time of being together, and a willingness and ability to overlook differences.

In terms of the education system, the author vividly describes the negatives. The violence in the schools depicted in this novel is also within my experience. Other references also illustrate this sad situation well, e.g., a particularly striking description by Karma Dondrub (2013:80-83):

Miss Li was my Chinese teacher. She was twenty-five, very arrogant, and regularly denigrated students from poor families and students whose parents did not work in government offices. I was from a simple nomad family, and immediately became a target of her mistreatment. I am not sure if she was really a bad person, but she always got angry at me whenever I did anything wrong. Every time she entered the classroom, I visualized her angry-looking face without looking at her. Before she beat me, she always praised certain students whose parents worked for the government, although there was really nothing to praise. Then she mercilessly beat my bottom with her stick. That made me homesick more than anything else.

Numerous other authors including Kondro Tsering (2007), Pad ma rin

chen (2013), Pema kyī (2015), G. yu 'brug and Stuart (2012), Rin chen rdo rje (2011), Tshes bcu lha mo (2013), Tsering Bum (2013), and Sonom Doomtso (2012) similarly give accounts of children bullying other students, and children being beaten by teachers in primary schools.

I have heard it argued that Tibetans fighting with other tribes or communities to protect their livestock and land has a long historical precedent. One must have the ability to protect property otherwise others will come and take it. The cultural meaning of masculinity, to fight and win and protect one's own family, tribe, and property; and the cultural imperative to overpower others (before they overpower you) are embedded in children and then manifest in bullying at school.

However, in this novel the primary explanation for children-on-children violence is the education system and within that, the school's poor management system. Rural schools in Amdo, especially in herding areas, were considered dumping grounds for teachers who broke rules, were disobedient to leaders, and were generally considered incompetent. They were sent here as punishment. Consequently, these teachers were generally unhappy with life, poorly supervised, and brutal to students.

Based on my experience as a student at Shes rig nor bu'i gling (Ra rgya School) from 2005 to 2011, I am convinced that a better education system is possible. Students from across all Tibetan areas in China attended this school and I cannot recall a single incident of student bullying. Most teachers were volunteers and very responsible. Their teachings of Buddhist ideas such as compassion to others influenced the students to be kind, care for younger students, and respect senior students. Corporal punishment was used, but lightly and generally only after a student had been warned three times.

Tshe ring don 'grub also reflects on the traditional marriage norms that restrict access to education. For example, Kun bzang lha mo is a brilliant student, but her family sends her to the groom's home after she finishes junior middle school. This resonates with my own experiences and observations. My parents (father, b. 1963; mother, b. 1963) married when they were fifteen. My mother did not know she

was engaged until fifteen days before her wedding ceremony. In another example, one of my former classmates was married while he was in senior middle school. Unbeknown to him, his family had prepared the wedding ceremony and were waiting for him when he returned home during the winter vacation.

Many parents also were not keen on their children attending school. Many students, unable to finish school, did not want to herd when they returned home. Older boys, for example, were given to wandering away from home, drinking, and playing billiards. Parents did not want their children to attempt to wrest money from them, and learn to be disobedient and disrespectful at school.

Parents also worried that their children would be hungry or poorly fed at school, that they would be ill and no one would properly care for them, and that teachers would beat them.

The author also suggests that children who manage to obtain an education in the state education system are mostly like Ting 'dzin - self-centered and adept at manipulating others through, for example, the skillful use of bribes. This is an outcome of the rule-centered, inflexible, and authoritarian modern education system.

The writer describes important national activities in a child's early education such as the Young Pioneers. Students loved this special day because they received special food treats, a Young Pioneer Red Scarf, a new school uniform, and they could participate in performances. However, this event was also used to stigmatize and essentially punish certain students' families who were blacklisted and consequently, whose children received nothing. Such students felt guilty and hated their family.

Woronov (2007) describes Chinese Children's Day as an institutional movement that produces national subjects:

The Little Red Pioneers, the Chinese Communist Party's organization for children aged 7-12, seem anachronistic in China today. This article argues that the Pioneer organization, rather than being an outdated relic of the nation's Maoist past, provides insight into contemporary Chinese nationalism, particularly the theoretical question of how children are

produced as national subjects. Based in Butler's concept of performativity, this article argues that children's nationalism in China is performed through daily activities and practices structured by the Little Red Pioneers (647).

Chinese Children's Day influences students' concept of self-identity and their life goals. For minorities, it is a strategy to inculcate a sense of national identity at the expense of ethnic identity.

I personally enjoyed Children's Day for the reasons mentioned above. I did not understand what the Young Pioneer Red Scarf represented, but I was proud because the teachers said that I was part of the nation after I wore the Red Scarf. I believed whatever my teachers told me, because all the parents in my community repeatedly told children to listen to the teachers. All the teachers and students were Tibetan and, at that time, I did not know there was a difference between Han and Tibetan except that they spoke different languages.

Students at my school were punished if they did not wear the Red Scarf for the once-a-week assembly in front of the national flag. During this school courtyard congregation, we sang China's national anthem. One of my classmates whose Red Scarf had been stolen, hated to line up because the teachers often dragged him by the ears in front of everybody and criticized him for breaking school rules, which meant that he was a bad person. My classmate could not afford to purchase a new Red Scarf so together we made one for him from a red cloth we found on the schoolyard.

The questions silently lurking behind this include: Should Tibetan parents send their children to schools? What difference does it make, and with what consequences? What are their choices?

Sexual encounters in the story are muted, but still claim the readers' attention. One account needs mentioning because it is unusual in a Tibetan-language novel. Bsam 'phel and Ting 'dzin meet their former middle school headmaster, Hei (Han Chinese), and share an evening of eating, drinking, and recalling their time in school together. By the end of the evening, Hei is a bit drunk and says that

rather than going to a hotel, he wants to stay with Bsam 'phel and Ting 'dzin.

Later that night, Ting 'dzin dreams that his girlfriend removes all her clothes, pulls down his underwear, and performs fellatio. Unable to breathe, Ting 'dzin awakens and is shocked when he sees Hei fondling and kissing his penis. He then kicks the embarrassed Hei off the bed.

Hei covers his face with his hands, and says, "I'm sorry, I have this problem of being only interested in men and I can't control myself. I'm sorry" (187).

This is one of the few examples of contemporary Tibetan writers describing a homosexual encounter and interestingly it is Hei, the Chinese man, who is the homosexual, and not a Tibetan. In respect of this, Lama Jabb notes:

On the rare occasions when homosexuality and autoeroticism surface in modern Tibetan poetry they almost exclusively concern lesbian sex or female masturbation, thereby denying through omission that such practices affect Tibetan men (2015:Kindle Locations 5054-5056).

About fifteen percent of the novel is dialogue. Humorous, colloquial language makes the novel more appealing, as does an occasional mix of Chinese with Tibetan language, e.g., *liangzhan* 'grain supply center', *liangpiao* 'food coupon', and *honglingjin* 'red scarf' (18). In terms of the colloquial, Bsam 'grub describes a student's eyes using *cha khug* (26) 'asshole' (LT: *bshang lam*; 'og sgo); Bsam 'phel's father says, *Ya zhi lu* (2) 'Hey! Boy!' (LT: *bu*), which Amdo people often use; and when Bsam 'phel and Ting 'dzin are chatting, the former says, "*Rogs pa lo lo*" (92) 'dear friend' (LT: *snying nye ba'i krog po*), an expression I often hear friends from Sog County use.

Everybody had a nickname when I was in school. Using nicknames was a way of making fun and teasing, and created more interesting and vivid verbal interchanges. Nicknames also appear in this novel. For example, Bsam 'phel's nickname is Mig rko 'Trench Eyes' because his eyes are small and deep-set while Ting 'dzin's

nickname is Mig 'jur 'Big Eyes' owing to his large eyes. Ting 'dzin and Bsam 'phel each uses the other's nicknames when they are together. In contrast, when they meet after many years, Ting 'dzin addresses Bsam 'phel more formally using his "real" name, which upsets Bsam 'phel because he now understands that their relationship is not what it had been. There is now a distance between them.

This novel is entirely credible as many events resonated with my own life experiences. It is also an entertaining read replete with details of the education system, life as a student, love and sex, complex relationships between friends and work colleagues, economic conditions, social expectations, and recollections of recent history and attempts to make sense of it.

But *My Two Fathers* is more than this in its critical presentation of A mdo life in the 1980s. As such, it is a valuable introduction to a version of modern A mdo social history that is unavailable in officially approved history books.

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## NON-ENGLISH TERMS

'og sgo འོག་སྒོ།

'phags pa thar འཕགས་པ་ཐར།

a mdo ཨ་མདོ།

a mtsho mo ཨ་མཚོ་མོ།

a tsi ཨ་ཅི།

bla ma skyabs ལྷ་མ་སྐྱམས།

*bde zhing yangs pa'i lam chen zhig* བདེ་ཞིང་ཡངས་པའི་ལམ་ཆེན་ཞིག།

brag dkar བྲག་དཀར།

bsam 'phel བསམ་འཕེལ།

bshang lam བཤང་ལམ།

btsun po don 'grub བཙུན་པོ་དོན་འགྲུབ།

bu བུ།

byams pa བྱམས་པ།

cha khug ཆ་ཁུག།

dpal kha དཔལ་ཁ།

ge sar གེ་སར།

Heka 河卡

Henan 河南

honglingjin 红领巾

Huangnan 黄南

Jinpingmei 金瓶梅

kun bzang lha mo ཀུན་བཟང་ལྷ་མོ།

lha kho ལྷ་ཁོ།

lha ris ལྷ་རིས།

Li Bai 李白

liangpiao 粮票

liangzhan 粮站

mes po མེས་པོ།

mgon po མགོན་པོ།

mig 'jur མིག་འཇུག།

mig rko མིག་རྫོ།

mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྒོན།

mthso sngon mi rigs dpe skrin khang མཚོ་སྒོན་མི་རིགས་དཔེ་སྐྱུན་ཁང།

nga yi a pha gnyis ང་ཡི་ཨ་ཕ་གཉིས།  
 pa sangs sgrol ma པ་སངས་སྒྲོལ་མ།

Pinyin 拼音

Qinghai 青海

ra rgya ར་རྒྱ།

rma lho ར་ལྷོ།

rogs pa lo lo རོགས་པ་ལོ་ལོ།

sangs rgyas bkra shis སངས་རྒྱས་བཀྲ་ཤིས།

sbrang char སྤང་ཅར།

shes rig nor bu'i gling ཤེས་རིག་ནོར་བུའི་གླིང་།

skal bzang don grub སྐལ་བཟང་དོན་གྲུབ།

snying nye ba'i grogs po སྙིང་ལྷེ་བའི་གྲོགས་པོ།

sog སོག།

stobs ldan སྟོབས་ལྷན།

thang ka ཐང་ཀ།

ting 'dzin ིང་འཛིན།

tshe ring don 'grub ཚེ་རིང་དོན་འགྲུབ།

Xinghai 兴海

ya zhi lu ཡ་ཞི་ལུ།

zi ling ཟི་ལིང་།

REVIEW: *SMUG PA*

Konchok Gelek (Dkon mchog dge legs དཀོན་མཆོག་དགེ་ལེགས།  
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Tshe ring don grub ཚེ་རིང་དོན་གྲུབ།. 2002. *Smug pa [Fog]*. Zi ling mi rigs dpe skrun khang རི་ལིང་མི་རིགས་དཔེ་སྐྱུར་ཁང། [Zi ling Nationalities Press].<sup>1</sup> Distributed by Hong Kong Qilin Press. 208pp. ISBN 962-950-109-1/D.99009 (paper cover 10RMB).

Tshe ring don grub was born in 1961 in Sog rdzong (Henan) Mongolian Autonomous County of Rma lho (Huangnan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province. Though he is classified as Mongolian, his mother tongue is A mdo Tibetan. *Smug pa* is his second novel, the first being *Mes po 'Ancestor'*, which was published in 2001. He also authored *Rlung dmar 'ur 'ur 'The Red Wind Screams'* (2009).

*Fog* begins with the protagonist, Seng ge, disappointed by a publisher's rejection of his novel, *Tears of the Wild Yak*. Seng ge, once a teacher at Rtse Area Nationality Middle School, shares with his colleagues, Red-Eyed Scholar (nickname) and Bde mchog, an interest in Tibetan literature and reading.

Me tog, Seng ge's wife, is contemptuous of "backward" nomads and their culture. She speaks Chinese whenever she can (dialogue between Me tog and Seng ge is presented in Chinese characters, followed by Tibetan translation). They are an odd couple as Seng ge was not only born into a herder's family, but he also has a fervent passion for Tibetan literature which leads him to become a writer.

One day, two young foreign women - an American, Jo'u tis 'Judy', and a Japanese, me'u ya rdza khe'u yo kho 'Yoko' - arrive to research Tibetan literature. Judy studies Tibetan at the provincial

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Konchok Gelek. 2017. Review: *Smug pa*. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 45:39-45.

<sup>1</sup> Although "Zi ling Nationalities Press" is listed as the publisher, I assume the book was printed by Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Nationalities Press.

nationalities university. In time, she not only translates *Tears of the Wild Yak* into English, but also publishes it in the USA, where it is recognized as one of the one hundred most outstanding novels of the world in the twentieth century, highlighting the irony of the book's rejection by a China publisher.

Judy is fascinated by the book and visits Rtse to see and experience the novel's setting first hand. She also provides 2,000 USD for the publication of the book in Tibetan.

Judy's visits to the Rtse area deepen her relationship with Seng ge. One day, she sits on a meadow by the banks of the Rtse River, facing a sky turned orange by the setting sun. The diminishing sunbeams illuminate her blond hair, rendering her a Greek goddess with a beauty and allure that mesmerizes Seng ge. No longer able to endure the mantle of etiquette, Seng ge kisses her. They are physically intimate on the river bank, a relationship that continues.

When Me tog learns of this development, she is disturbed by her husband's relationship with, in her terms, the "foreign whore"/"American stooge." She also takes to referring to Seng ge as a "henchman of American Imperialism."

One day, she quarrels with Seng ge and slams Judy's expensive camera to the ground. On another occasion, she pulls Judy's hair in a catfight. This behavior further separates Seng ge and Me tog, who are soon in a relationship that is beyond recovery. Seng ge then decides to leave that disturbed, foggy environment and search for a better life with Judy in America.

Judy, however, is not the cause of this failed marriage. Profound differences separate Me tog and Seng ge in many aspects of life and it clear that they should never have married. When they were in middle school, Seng ge regularly challenged students from the Chinese language medium class (classes taught in the Chinese language), which include Me tog. He even made a tall paper hat with four Chinese characters reading "Down with Me tog" and marked it with a red X. Me tog's father, a government leader, then came to the school with several policemen, arrested Seng ge, and scolded and beat him.

Later, Seng ge and Me tog attend the provincial nationalities university where he studies Tibetan literature and she studies art. Me tog is attracted by Seng ge's outstanding academic performance and good looks. They fall in love and marry after graduation. However, their many differences create tension, which becomes more severe with the arrival of the "foreign whore," husband-stealing Judy.

Judy respects herders and their culture. Her ability to communicate in Tibetan is impressive. Her generosity and sympathy is illustrated when Seng ge reluctantly asks if he can use the 2,000 USD publishing grant to help pay for Bde mchog's girlfriend, Kun dga' sgrol ma, who is critically ill in hospital. Kun dga' sgrol ma's two brothers left for Lha sa and were never heard of again, and she has no parents.

Kun dga' sgrol ma dreamed of working in the city and trusted Longneck (nickname) who often brings rural girls to the city with the promise of jobs and prosperity. What little hesitation she had left was allayed after a positive divination by 'Brong Rin po che. Bde mchog then gave 10,000 RMB from his savings to Longneck so that he can ostensibly bribe leaders to secure a job for Kun dga' sgrol ma in the city.

Predictably, Kun dga' sgrol ma ends up in a city nightclub, offering "special services" to officials. She becomes very ill and cannot afford to pay her medical expenses. Kun dga' sgrol ma, expecting Me tog to visit her, instead sees Judy. Seng ge and Judy keep watch by her hospital bed until Kun dga' sgrol ma draws her last breath.

Seng ge prepares for his departure for America. He donates his book collection to the county culture center and he and Judy visit his family to say good-bye. Judy enjoys the time with this herding family. During their visit, they notice two security personnel tailing them - one Han and the other Tibetan. Seng ge recognizes these two as the same men who shamelessly watched through the glass panels above the door of a room where he and Judy were having sex.

Finally, Seng ge and Judy fly to Beijing National Airport. Will they make a success of their attempt to start a new life? Readers will find the answer at the end of the novel.

This work does not specify the place and time of the story. The author finished this novel in 1999, however, it is clear the setting is the

1990s as this part of China is perched on the edge of unprecedented socio-economic changes.

This novel illustrates educated Tibetans' lives and loves in the contemporary socio-political context. Having earned a government job and with basic survival no longer an issue, the protagonists thus find meaning in life by writing and discussing literature. This typified the behavior of elites in China prior to the time a market-driven economy had taken root. Consequently, Seng ge and his colleagues come across as idealistic and naïve at times.

Many book titles and authors' names from both China and abroad are sprinkled in the novel's dialogues, helping to further create a realistic social environment that educated Tibetans lived in. A book-centered life and idealism had not yet been buried by the prevailing system of corruption.

Seng ge's group yearned to reform the malfunctioning school system and proposed relevant reform policies to the county government. This proposal is eventually approved with assistance from their friend, the smooth operator, Tshul khirms, who is put in charge of the school. New school policies dramatically improve students' performance. However, a local restaurant owner produces a detailed list of expenditures for food and liquor with Tshul khirms' signature and requests payment. Seng ge and Bde mchog then look for other jobs to avoid involvement. And later, when Tshul khirms gives 10,000 *yuan* to Seng ge before his trip to the USA, Seng ge is infuriated, assuming the money is tainted.

Rtse county town is often enveloped in thick fog due to the summer weather and air pollution from a factory in the town. The lack of clarity caused by the weather in combination with industrial pollution creates air and water pollution in a once-pristine pastureland that was home to both herders and wildlife. Seng ge dislikes foggy summer days and cold, windy winter days. These predicaments mirror Seng ge's personal crises, e.g., the uncertainty of his marriage and the murky reasons behind his novel's rejection.

The author also satirizes those who blindly follow *bla ma*. 'Brong Rin po che's advice to Kun dga' sgröl ma results in a tragic

ending. Furthermore, the same *bla ma* does a divination regarding the suitability of Red-Eyed Scholar marrying his girlfriend. The result is that Red-Eyed Scholar does not marry her and becomes depressed, drinks, and gambles, and ruins his life.

An uneasy cultural intertwining between herders and the dominant Han is a theme that the author alludes to through dialogue and episodes. Me tog is a model citizen created by the education system. Though a proletarian, revolutionary, and Party member, her father cannot speak fluent Tibetan as illustrated in his speech in broken Tibetan mimicking Chinese intonation in bureaucratic tones.

Me tog's behavior when she is in a rage reminds readers of typical angry Han women performing in TV dramas, screaming and stomping the floor to express their anger and frustration. Me tog not only deems nomadic culture to be backward, but is disgusted by the smell of one of Seng ge's guests, which ignites Seng ge's hot temper.

The author highlights intimacy between Seng ge and Judy by using *nga'i snying sdug* 'dear' and *gces phrug* 'baby'. He also frequently uses such terms as "see you," "good-bye," and "absurd." Seng ge is particularly fond of "absurd," which is presented in English followed by Tibetan translation.

Judy's religious beliefs are never clearly explained. Ostensibly, her Tibetan literature study and novel translation explain her presence in China. However, when children in Seng ge's extended family ask her to tell a story one night, she gives a Christian account of Creation. This may reflect the fact that at this time, many foreigners in Tibetan areas were Christian missionaries who were actively proselytizing.

Seng ge's affection for animals, the grassland, and nomadic culture are at odds with the corrupt socio-political system. For example, when the government mandates all those under the age of thirty participate in military drills in their work unit, Seng ge expresses dislike for anything related to the military. He recalls childhood memories of cruel soldiers and their unspeakable brutality towards small animals, e.g., setting fire to sparrows and tossing them into the air, or putting living frogs atop ant dens to be eaten alive.

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When Seng ge asks permission to leave work to visit Kun dga' sgrol ma in the hospital, his leader disapproves on the grounds that a grassland conflict has erupted and the Party secretary has announced that leaves are not permitted. Seng ge angrily points out that this conflict has no relationship with his request for leave. He then accuses the leaders of hoping for such violent disputes over pastureland because they have nothing to do.

This difference between Seng ge and the "system" is accentuated by Me tog. She stands in opposition to his values and beliefs - who and what he is. In contrast, Seng ge finds common ground with Judy, who echoes his interests, including a love of nature and the culture of Tibet. Judy, an American, represents the West and its acceptance of differences, pro-environment conservation attitudes, and the value of preserving indigenous culture. Such notions are totally outside Me tog's universe.

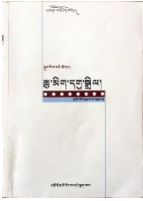
Differences between Me tog and Judy might be found in answers to two questions: (1) What cultures do the two women represent? (2) What do the differences in their behavior imply? Answers to these questions help further explain this novel's social and political implications.

## NON-ENGLISH TERMS

'brong rin po che འབྲོང་རིན་པོ་ཆེ།  
 a mdo ཨ་མདོ།  
 bde mchog བདེ་མཆོག  
 bla ma བླ་མ།  
 gces phrug གཅེས་ཕུག  
 Henan 河南  
 Huangnan 黄南  
 jo'u tis ཇོ་འུ་ཏིས་  
 kun dga' sgrol ma ཀུན་དགའ་སྒྲོལ་མ།  
 lha sa ལྷ་ས།  
 me tog མེ་ཏོག  
 mes po མེས་པོ།  
 me'u ya rdza ke'u yo ko/ me'u ya rdza khe'u yo kho མེ་འུ་ཡ་རྩ་ཀེ་འུ་ལོ་ཀོ་/ མེ་འུ་ཡ་རྩ་ཁེ་འུ་ལོ་ཁོ་  
 mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྒོན།  
 nga'i snying sdug ང་འི་སྙིང་སྟུག  
 Qinghai 青海  
 Qilin 麒麟  
 rlung dmar 'ur 'ur རླུང་དམར་འུར་འུར།  
 rma lho རྩ་ལྷོ།  
 rtse རྩེ།  
 rtse khog རྩེ་ཁོག  
 seng ge སེང་གེ།  
 tshe ring don grub ཚེ་རིང་དོན་གུབ།  
 tshul khirms ཚུལ་ཁིམས།  
 zi ling mi rigs dpe skrun khang ཟི་ལིང་མི་རིགས་དཔེ་སྐྱུན་ཁང་།

REVIEW: *CHU MIG DGU SGRIL*

Konchok Gelek (Dkon mchog dge legs འཛོམས་མཆོག་དགེ་ལེགས།  
Gengqiu Gelai 更求格来, Independent Scholar)<sup>1</sup>



Phur bu tshe ring ཕུར་བུ་ཤེ་རིང་།. 2014. *Chu mig dgu sgril* རྒྱ་མིག་དགུ་སྒྲིལ། [*The Nine-eyed Sling*]. Zi ling ཟེ་ལིང་།: Mtsho ngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang མཆོག་སྒྲུབ་མི་རིགས་དཔེ་སྐྱུར་ཁང་། [Mtsho ngon Nationalities Press]. 283pp. ISBN 978-7-5420-2399-5 (paperback 32RMB).

Phur bu tshe ring is from Gzhis ka rtse District, the Tibet Autonomous Region, which is where the British invasion of Tibet, led by Francis Younghusband (1863-1942), took place. He enjoyed listening to stories in his childhood, including accounts of the invasion. The British invasion cost several thousand, mostly Tibetan, lives, and is an important event in recent Tibetan history. The author claims preserving such history is the primary motivation for writing this novel, which is set in a remote agro-pastoral community.

The State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television of the People's Republic of China initiated a project related to original art and literature. The novel under review was one of seventy-seven selected works out of 1,237 applications from throughout China. Ranking twentieth among those accepted, it was the only work selected from Qinghai Province (Xinhua 2015). This interest was not unprecedented, i.e., Barnett (2012) writes:

A film, a television series, four plays and an opera have been produced in China since 1997 dramatising the invasion of Tibet by the British in 1903-04. These works were part of an official effort to enhance patriotic spirit among Chinese and Tibetan people through historical example... (195).

The novel under review begins with a couple, Tshul khrims and

Konchok Gelek. 2017. Review: *Chu mig dgu sgril*. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 45:46-50.

Skyid skyid, concerned about the marriage of their younger son, Rdor rje rig 'dzin. Through matchmaking, Rdor rje rig 'dzin marries Sgrol ma, the beautiful daughter of a farmer. The description of the wedding is detail-oriented, indicating the author's understanding of cultural aspects of the place where he grew up and heard tales of heroic deeds, allowing him to paint the novel with realistic features.

A year after the marriage, Sgrol ma gives birth to a son. The new couple love each other, and their old parents are satisfied with life, enjoying a pleasant life in a beautiful landscape with seasonal agricultural work.

However, news of a British invasion interrupts this dream-like happiness. The Tibetan government drafts young men to create a defense force. Rdor rje rig 'dzin and his friend, Lhun grub, join the force, leaving their wives and young children behind. They then witness the confrontation between ill-equipped Tibetan troops and uniformed modern troops equipped with Maxim guns, heavy artillery, and high-powered rifles.

Negotiation between the two sides fails. The British insist on marching further into Tibetan territory where Tibetan troops ambush the British troops in a forested valley. Rdor rje rig 'dzin and Lhun grub experience hand-to-hand combat. The British forces then take revenge by indiscriminately killing noncombatants.

Amid these hostilities, Rdor rje rig 'dzin and Lhun grub are ordered to disguise themselves as farmers, ascertain the British position, and report their findings. Before returning, they attack the British camp under the cover of night, kill a few soldiers with swords, and then disappear into the darkness.

The Tibetan delegation and British Expedition attempt to negotiate, but there is no successful outcome. The British lure the Tibetans into negotiating and then clandestinely prepare to fire on them. Fighting breaks out and a massacre ensues from the hot muzzles of Maxim guns, resulting in the catastrophic bloodshed of several hundred Tibetan soldiers, including Lhun grub.

Rdor rje rig 'dzin transports his friend's corpse back to his village. Lhun grub's young widow endures the heartbreak that

accompanies her hopeless life and fatherless son. Sgrol ma worries about her husband meeting the same fate. As expected, Rdor rje rig 'dzin is summoned to return to his troops. Before leaving, he kisses his child.

As their casualties mount, the Tibetan leaders mobilize all able-bodied men to help, but this merely slows down the unstoppable British forces. Each advance the British make is at the expense of the poorly-equipped farmer-soldiers.

The British troops seize the last stronghold in Rgyal rtse County where Tibetan soldiers continue resisting from the fortified castle at the top of a rocky hill near the county town. The British army launch an offensive complete with heavy shelling, but all attempts to take the castle fail, owing to the determined, furious defense of the Tibetan soldiers.

Eventually, the Tibetan fighters run out of supplies and ammunition, and must resort to hand-to-hand combat in a hopeless struggle. Many jump off a cliff to avoid capture. Some successfully escape. What happened to the main character? Did his family reunite? Did the nine-eyed sling protect him? Our curiosity keeps us reading to find answers.

*Chu mig dgu sgril*, the title of this novel, also suggests a sling that features a pattern of nine eyes that is believed to function as a protective amulet. This adds suspense to the main character's fate, given the obvious result when antiquated muzzleloaders and swords encounter Maxim guns and modern rifles.

More than a century has passed since the British invasion of Tibet. The author, though an adult, did not have the benefit of hearing the living memories of those who witnessed the invasion. This presents challenges to composing a novel based on historical facts. The author spent four years on this project. He might have reviewed historical documents drawn from dusty shelves and/or oral narratives in an attempt to restore a true history. Luo (2015), an editor for Mtsho ngon Nationalities Press, states that place names, dates of major events, and the names of important figures involved in this narrative match the historical record.

However, this novel lacks a detailed historical background. What explains the British invasion? The answer is complex, involving geopolitical issues between the British and Russian empires, pertinent events, and treaties. However, the novel simplifies all this convolution into a basic contrast between good and bad, righteous and criminal, brutal invaders and valiant defenders. The British forces are portrayed as vicious, greedy, dishonest, and malicious rapists, looters, thieves, and destroyers of Buddhism.<sup>1</sup> This is in stark contrast to the Tibetans.

The British troops are described using various derogatory adjectives, in sharp contrast to the commendatory terms used to describe Tibetans. This is reminiscent of revolutionary novels and films in China that describe the ruling class of pre-1950s Tibetan government officials. Ironically, this novel portrays Tibetan political and military leaders as willing to sacrifice their lives bravely and patriotically for their homeland.

The British Expedition included Indian and Nepalese soldiers (McKay 2012), however, the author's depictions of British soldiers with features suggest there were only Caucasians. This might mislead readers about the makeup of the British troops.

Rdor rje rig 'dzin and his comrades' personalities are so indistinguishable that they seem to be the same person with different names. They all display righteous courage with a clear demarcation between love and hate. The author could have better characterized the protagonists. Complex human characteristics would have complemented the novel and made it more realistic. Human nature is more than black and white.

The novel vividly portrays how the protagonist is involved in an unbalanced conflict between the British expeditionary troops and locals. The writing is standard, written Tibetan with minimal dialectal influence. Sentences are so well-crafted, succinct, and clear that the novel is a worthy template for young writers wishing to emulate excellent literary Tibetan.

Undoubtedly, the author is passionate about his fellow

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<sup>1</sup> See photos taken by Captain William Hayman in 1903 during the British invasion of Tibet at <http://goo.gl/QQtC75> (accessed 25 October 2016).

Tibetans defending their homeland. To what extent is objectivity required when writing historical fiction? The author's answer seems to be a summoning of a patriotic vision rather than a more mundane narration.

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## NON-ENGLISH TERMS

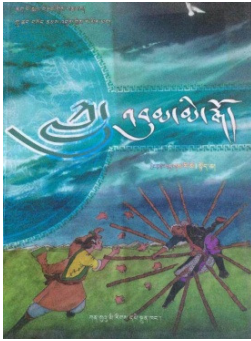
chu mig dgu sgril ལྷ་མིག་དགུ་སྒྲིལ།  
 gzhis ka rtse གཙམ་ཀ་རུ་ཙེ།  
 lhun grub ལུན་གུབ།  
 mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang མཚོ་སྔོན་མི་རིགས་དཔེ་སྐྱུན་ཁང་།  
 phur bu tshe ring ཕུར་བུ་ཙེ་རིང་།  
 rdor rje rig 'dzin རྡོ་རྗེ་རིག་འཛིན།  
 rgyal rtse རྒྱལ་རུ་ཙེ།  
 sgrol ma སྒྲོལ་མ།  
 skyid skyid སྐྱིད་སྐྱིད།  
 tshul khrims ལྷུ་ལ་ཁྲིམས།  
 zi ling ཟི་ལིང་།

REVIEW: *KLU 'BUM MI RGOD*

Reviewed by Pad+ma rig 'dzin བདེན་པདྨ་རིག་འཛིན། (Independent Scholar)

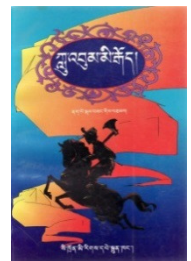


Nag po skal bzang ནག་པོ་སྐལ་བཟང་། [Nakpo Kelzang]. 2013. *Klu 'bum mi rgod ལུ་འབྲུམ་མི་རྟོན།* [The Wild Man of Klu 'bum]. Zi ling ཟི་ལིང་།: Mtsho ngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang མཚོ་སྔོན་མི་རིགས་དཔེ་སྐྱུང་ཁང་། [Mtsho ngon Nationalities Press]. 2 Volumes. 696pp. ISBN 978-7-5420-2075-8 (paperback 80RMB).



Nag po skal bzang [Nakpo Kelzang] ནག་པོ་སྐལ་བཟང་། (Klu tshang bsod noms 'bum ལུ་ཚང་བསོད་ནམས་འབྲུམ་། [Lu tsang sonam bum], illustrator). 2013. *Klu 'bum mi rgod ལུ་འབྲུམ་མི་རྟོན།* [The Wild Man of Klu 'bum]. Kan su'u ཀན་སུ་ཡུ་མི་རིགས་དཔེ་སྐྱུང་ཁང་། [Gansu Nationalities Press]. 353pp. Numerous black and white illustrations. ISBN 978-7-5421-2240-7 (paperback 31RMB).

Inside the front book cover, the reader is informed that Nag po skal bzang (b. 1955 in Gling rgya Village, Thun rin (Reb gong, Tongren) County, Rma lho (Huangnan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho ngon (Qinghai) Province) graduated from Mtsho ngon Nationalities University in 1982, and is a well-known Tibetan writer and editor at Mtsho ngon Nationalities Press. The author of more than twenty papers in both Tibetan and Chinese, he has published fifteen books including *Dmyal zangs nang na ku re med 'Hell: No Joking'*, and *Brel sha langs pa'i mtshar gтам 'The Frightening Witticism'*.<sup>1</sup>



Pad+ma rig 'dzin. 2017. Review: *Klu 'bum mi rgod*. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 45:51-65.

<sup>1</sup> I included material in this introduction from <http://tinyurl.com/zsse4kj>

One of the longest contemporary Tibetan-language novels, Nag po skal bzang wrote this work based on folklore surrounding the well-known figure, Klu 'bum.<sup>1</sup> Termed "the first Tibetan martial arts fiction" (Robin 2009-2010:18), volume one of *the Wild Man of Klu 'bum* was serialized in *Mangs tsogs sgyu rtsal 'Mass Art'* in 1992. Later, it was published (see image above) in 1997 by Sichuan Nationalities Press.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, it was recorded and broadcast by Mthso sngon Nationalities Broadcast Station.<sup>3</sup> In 2007, the second volume appeared in *Mtsho ngon bod yig tsags par 'Mtsho ngon Tibetan Newspaper'*.

Below, I provide a summary of the two volumes published in 2013 and give comments.

### Chapters 1-3

A lnga mtheb drug is a powerful, ruthless monk known for his cruel treatment of other monks at his monastery. At an eatery by the street where A lnga mtheb drug often eats meat and drinks liquor, a teenager holding an ax challenges him. During the ensuing fight, the monk hits the ax with his fist, smashes the handle into pieces, and throws the pieces into the crowd that has gathered to be entertained by the fight. An old man with a long braid comes to the teenager's aid, fights off A lnga mtheb drug, picks up the teenager, and flees.

To the teenager's surprise, the old man neither tells his own name nor asks his name. When he asks why, the old man replies that names are unimportant, and adds that he is a mad yogi. The teenager then prostrates and sincerely asks to be accepted as the yogi's student so that he can learn martial arts. The old yogi agrees and takes him to the mountaintop where he lives.

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(accessed 5 May 2016).

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Chos bstan rgyal (nd:38).

<sup>2</sup> This image is from <http://tinyurl.com/hwggqett> (accessed 5 May 2016). The 1997 version has 347 pages (ISBN/ISSN 7540919094).

<sup>3</sup> A person associated with this broadcast told me that he recalled the broadcast was first made in about 2004.

The old yogi names the teenager after his cave, Klu 'bum, which may be translated as 'countless nagas', given the thousands of nagas in the mountains where they live. Klu 'bum practices. To the old yogi's surprise, he masters in a month what others need a year to learn. After six years, he can fly as his teacher does and walk quickly atop steep cliffs.

One day, the old yogi brings a weak, young monk (Bsam blo 'bum thongs) to their cave and explains that he saved him from A lnga mtheb drug, who killed Bsam blo 'bum thongs's teacher and planned to kill the little monk. A lnga mtheb drug enjoys drinking from young people's skulls, thus his servants wanted to offer him a skull with a full set of teeth as a gift.

Klu 'bum recalls his own experiences of suffering: after his parents died, he was raised by his brave monk uncle, who frequently argued with A lnga mtheb drug because he often broke monastery rules. After A lnga mtheb drug killed his uncle, Klu 'bum became homeless and endured hunger, cold, heat, rain, and snow.

Six years after saving him, the old yogi orders Klu 'bum to kill A lnga mtheb drug to end the suffering of those he oppresses. "After you finish your assignment, go to Lha sa with Bsam blo 'bum thongs," adds the old yogi.

On the way to carry out this assignment, Bsam blo 'bum thongs visits a former teacher. Meanwhile, Klu 'bum meets two brothers, who want to avenge their parents. The two brothers fight A lnga mtheb drug and fail. After one brother is killed, Klu 'bum leaps in and fights A lnga mtheb drug, ultimately killing him by pulling off his head.

The surviving brother is amazed by such martial skills, kneels, and says, "Please, allow me to follow you. I will serve you as best I can. My name is Dka' thub rtsid bu."

Klu 'bum agrees.

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 Chapters 4-8

One night, Rab 'byor, a traditional doctor, shares a room with Blo bzang dge 'dun, a monk at the White Hermitage. The door to their room suddenly bursts open and someone falls inside. It is Phyag rdor, a monk of Wa bstan Monastery, who has been poisoned. He confides that his monastery had several old books about martial arts that were written by a *bla ma*. These books had been kept in a deity image for two centuries, in the hope that a good man would take them and practice martial arts to help the weak and vanquish evil.

Gzugs med skya thub, the leader of a group who kills and steals from the weak, had learned about the books and ordered his female servant, Khyi rko, who is skilled in the use of poisons, to take some members of their group with her and seize the books.

Blo bzang dge 'dun promises to retrieve the books, dons lay clothing, and leaves the White Hermitage. He pretends to be Klu 'bum, which intimidates ruffians he contacts. Meanwhile, he meets the real Klu 'bum on his way to Zi ling (Xining).

Khyi rko and her aides return with the books to Lcags nag brag ri rtse dgu where Gzugs med skya thub and his attendants live. On the way, they kidnap Dka' thub rtsid bu and imprison him in a cave. Klu 'bum and Blo bzang dge 'dun reach Ba yan thang and see a charming woman (Dbyangs can khro mo) fighting Gzugs med skya thub's aides. They assist her and then join a group of heroes planning to kill Gzugs med skya thub. Blo bzang dge 'dun becomes the leader of these heroes.

When Gzugs med skya thub discovers that the books taken by Kyi rko are not genuine, she and her son are killed. Gzugs med skya thub lives and meditates at Lcags nag brag ri rtse dgu, which is guarded day and night. Klu 'bum and the heroes attack and fight the guards for a long while, finally entering the huge stone cave where they find Dka' thub rtsid bu crouched among many skulls and corpses. They then kill the three guards inside the cave.

Klu 'bum and his heroes follow a blood track leading to a forest where four beautiful young women attack them. After enduring a long, hard fight, they break into a room without doors and windows and find

a young man (Gzugs med skya thub). He appears to be a humble, intelligent scholar. He is putting organs from corpses into a straw figure. Once completed, Gzugs med skya thub would become so powerful with the help of the black arts that no one would be able to kill him.

Gzugs med skya thub and Klu 'bum then fight until the former is dead. There are many boxes of gold, silver, and turquoise in Gzugs med skya thub's room. Klu 'bum takes fifty pieces of silver for himself, while the gold and turquoise are used to rebuild Wa bstan Monastery, which had been destroyed by Gzugs med skya thub's followers. Silver is given to help poor people. Klu 'bum then goes to Zi ling with Dka' thub rtsid bu.

## Chapters 9-12

The first night in Zi ling, Klu 'bum and Dka' thub rtsid bu stay at a small inn. A drunk young man joins them and talks so much that it proves annoying. Finally, they fight and Klu 'bum injures the young man, who unfortunately, is the son of a local leader, Phun tshogs bong gseb.

Local officials imprison Klu 'bum. Dka' thub rtsid bu bribes a guard and then is able to easily visit Klu 'bum, who tells him, "Don't worry about me, but you must find my friend, Bsam blo 'bum thongs, who will reach Zi ling soon."

The local leaders allow Klu 'bum to compete with a Chinese man (Khreng ching), who is a famous fighter. Klu 'bum wins this contest and they become good friends.

Klu 'bum asks the local minister residing in Zi ling, if he can squeeze Phun tsogs bong gseb.

Not knowing how powerful Klu 'bum is, the leader agrees, thinking, "Of course, nobody can squeeze another person to death." He then gives consent but adds, "You can squeeze him with your hands only once, and you can't hit him with your fingers."

Phun tsogs bong gseb is trembling and frightened, nevertheless, he is pushed in front of Klu 'bum who, to the onlookers' astonishment, grabs his upper torso and squeezes him to death.

It is now autumn and Klu 'bum wants to leave for Lha sa so his friend, Khreng ching, escorts them for some distance before saying goodbye. On the way to Lha sa, they meet Dbyangs can khro mo, who was one of Klu 'bum's allies when they killed Gzugs med skya thub. She had fallen in love with Klu 'bum, gone home, and then missing Klu 'bum, she resolved to find him.

Phun tsogs bong gseb's mother hires a killer named Wheeled Sword to avenge her son. During an ensuing fight, Wheeled Sword cuts Dbyangs can khro mo with his poisoned sword. She immediately collapses. Klu 'bum takes her in his arms to an old white-haired doctor, who promises to care for her until she recovers.

Klu 'bum, Dka' thub rtsid bu, and Bsam blo 'bum thongs are exhausted and famished when they reach the end of a valley where they meet an old white-haired woman with a wrinkled face. They ask her, "Does anyone live in this valley? We would like to eat and rest here, please."

"I have some milk tea. Come with me to my home if you like," the old woman replies. They automatically follow her, but then Klu 'bum thinks, "Why do we so trustingly follow her?" Believing something is amiss, he sits cross-legged on the ground and begins meditating. Meanwhile, Dka' thub rtsid bu and Bsam blo 'bum thongs follow the old woman.

This is the Land of Disfigured People and the old woman, Dung mgo ma, is a queen and proficient in the black arts. She has outlived all her relatives except for a niece, Sems skyid sgrol ma, a beautiful, charming woman who is skilled in both the martial and black arts. Many handsome, wealthy princes proposed marriage to her, but she refused them all. Annoyed by common standards of beauty, she chose the ugliest man to be her bridegroom. They then steal babies, put them in clay pots, and feed them there to make them disfigured.

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 Chapters 13-15

Klu 'bum passes through a serpentine valley for a long while, searching for his friends. Then an old woman with white hair and other ugly women who resemble ghosts attack Klu 'bum. During this time, a group of disfigured men arrive. When Klu 'bum sees his friend, Dka' thub rtsid bu, ridden by a disfigured man, he angrily runs after them.

Meanwhile, an old woman attacks Klu 'bum with her cane. After a long fight, he dispatches her and captures the old, white-haired woman. His other attackers flee, including the man riding his friend. Klu 'bum releases the old woman and says, "Please, we don't have anything you want - no money, no food, and no gold. If you release my friends unharmed, we will leave your region without any argument."

His friends are not, however, released. Consequently, he goes to the castle (Pho brang nor bu bdun sbungs) where his friends are held in order to release them. Finally, however, Klu 'bum only finds Dka' thub rtsid bu in the castle. Afterward, Klu 'bum flees the castle with Dka' thub rtsid bu.

Ngo sta re 'Ax-Face' - his forehead sticks out like an ax, hence his name - is very ugly and the husband of Sems skyid sgrol ma. He leads many people to pursue Klu 'bum and his friend. In the fighting that follows, Klu 'bum kills countless disfigured men who are Ngo sta re's soldiers.

Klu 'bum reaches a deep, wide valley. Ngo sta re pulls his bowstring with all his might and shoots at Klu 'bum's knees, but Klu 'bum immediately jumps on the arrow, which transports him across the wide valley. Ngo sta re returns to his home with his followers.

Dka' thub rtsid bu is again captured by Ngo sta re's men. Next, Klu 'bum goes to the foot of a cliff where a clean spring flows into the horizon. He eats *rtsam pa* with water and puts on a sheepskin robe from a soldier he had killed earlier. He pastes white sheep hair around his mouth to resemble a beard, and dons a white hat. Disguised as an old man, he walks with a cane to the castle where his friends are imprisoned. Nobody pays attention to Klu 'bum as Ngo sta re and some

of his servants make incense offerings in the big yard. Klu 'bum thus enters the castle safely.

But then Ngo sta re turns and says, "Who are you?" Klu 'bum then quickly kills Ngo sta re with his fists.

After Dbyangs can khro mo recovers, she misses Klu 'bum and begins searching for him, eventually locating him in the Region of Disfigured Men. Dbyangs can khro mo kills Sems skyid sgrol ma with an arrow after she deceives Klu 'bum using the black arts.

## Chapters 16-17

Klu 'bum comes to a village and a local couple allows all of them to stay in their home. That night, the couple's son takes Dka' thub rtsid bu outside and says, "There is something wrong in the room we have rented to some strangers. They don't leave during the day. A lamp flickers in their window all night, and sometimes women scream inside the room."

The couple's son and Dka' thub rtsid bu surreptitiously go near the door of the room where they are suddenly frightened by a loud sound. Dka' thub rtsid bu immediately flees. The couple's son is unable to escape. At dawn the next morning, his head wrapped in a cloth is thrown into the room where Klu 'bum, Dka' thub rtsid bu, Bsam blo 'bum thongs, and Dbyangs can khro mo are staying.

The friends accompany the couple to Dar mdo, report the murder to the local leader (Dar mdo hwa shang), who has nine sons, and then they search for the murderer. While searching, Klu 'bum and Dbyangs can khro mo find a big house in the forest where more than twenty beautiful, naked young women are being abused by several tough men, who fondle their small breasts and bottoms. A big, rough man even slashes one girl's cheek.

After Dbyangs can khro mo and Klu 'bum break the door down and kill the men with their swords, all the girls return to their homes except for one ('Bum skyid) from Lha sa, who explains, "I'm from a noble family. I was kidnapped while walking alone on a narrow street."

In fact, three of Dar mdo hwa shang's sons and a Chinese merchant had murdered the local couple's son. They cheat others to get money, and they also sell beautiful girls.

## Chapters 18-22

Dar mdo hwa shang hires two men to kill Klu 'bum and his friends. They attack, kidnap 'Bum skyid, and flee. But then the killers are stopped by three brothers who are searching for their sister. Klu 'bum arrives and slays the two killers. Dar mdo hwa shang next orders his people to attack Klu 'bum a second time and detains 'Bum skyid again.

After a long fight, Klu 'bum wins, but falls unconscious. Dbyangs can khro mo gives Klu 'bum medicine and departs, thinking, "Klu 'bum is in love with 'Bum skyid." Her love for Klu 'bum is such that she cannot bear to see him in love with another.

'Bum skyid nurses Klu 'bum back to health, declares her affection, and the two are soon deeply in love. They overcome various challenges and reach Lha sa, where they visit 'Bum skyid's wealthy family, who own a lavish mansion. 'Bum skyid puts on glorious clothing and gives expensive clothes to her lover and friends.

'Bum skyid's father (Rtsis dpon dgra 'dul dbang phyug), however, is worried that his daughter has fallen in love with an orphan with no property and no high position. 'Bum skyid's parents discuss how to end the relationship between the young lovers and then detain their daughter in a room. Afterwards, 'Bum skyid's father invites Klu 'bum and his two friends to his home for a meal and tells Klu 'bum, "I'm sure, you love my daughter as much as I do. A noble family has asked for my daughter, which is very good for her. It is best if you leave my daughter. I will give you whatever you want if you end your relationship with her."

Though devastated, Klu 'bum offers no argument. In anguish, he goes to an inn, drinks heavily, and fights the inn manager. Klu 'bum is then taken away from the bar by Dka' thub rtsid bu and Bsam blo 'bum thongs.

Separated from his love, Klu 'bum is overcome by sadness and a sense of desperation. Disgusted with the impermanent world, he goes to 'Bras spungs/Drepung Monastery to become a monk with his friend Bsam blo 'bum thongs. However, the sons of Dar mdo hwa shang, the local leader killed by Klu 'bum, find Klu 'bum at 'Bras spungs. Intent on avenging their father, they are instead killed by Klu 'bum with their own swords.

Meanwhile, Dka' thub rtsid bu wanders in the streets like a dog and joins a group of beggars. During the era of Khri srong lde btsan,<sup>1</sup> a leader of beggars (Gral gdong) had acquired a sacred stick from Padmasambhava<sup>2</sup> and protected it for many generations. The leader of the group of beggars that Dka' thub rtsid bu joins is a descendant of Gral gdong. He has a daughter (Dkar mo yag), who meets and marries Dka' thub rtsid bu.

## Chapters 23-26

A yogi (Rgya gar ba ng+da ra twa dzo+o) from India steals a precious image from the Potala Palace. The Lha sa government orders 'Bum skyid's father to find and bring back the image or else he will be imprisoned. He then takes his daughter and visits Klu 'bum to ask him to help apprehend the Indian thief. He also apologizes for mistreating the young lovers and promises they may marry after obtaining the image.

Klu 'bum then pursues the yogi. After various challenges, he reaches Ka lon sbug/Kalimpong and after several days, moves on to Ka li ka da/Calcutta in pursuit of the image. On the way, he meets Dka' thub rtsid bu and his wife, who are also trying to obtain the image. One of the Indian yogi's servants attacks Klu 'bum and his friends, but they survive. Later, Mi chung rkang mgyogs, one of Rgya gar ba ng+da ra twa dzo+o's students, leads them to the Indian yogi, who says to Klu

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<sup>1</sup> Reigned 755-797.

<sup>2</sup> An Indian Buddhist who brought Tantric Buddhism to Tibet. He is often described as founding Tibet's first Buddhist monastery.

'bum, "It is good to see you. We will compete in martial art skills. If you win, I'll give you the image; if not, you will be my servant forever."

After a long fight, Klu 'bum predictably wins and eventually takes the image back to Lha sa - but not before more fights ensue, including one with the most powerful yogi (Grib chen ha ri go mi) meditating in the Himalayas.

## Chapters 27-30

Klu 'bum is invited by Thong he, A lnga mtheb drug's teacher, living on Mount Wutai, to participate in a martial arts contest. He plots to kill Klu 'bum with the help of his cruel students to avenge the death of A lnga mtheb drug. Instead, Klu 'bum kills them all.

Klu 'bum returns to Lha sa and finds many changes. 'Bum skyid's father, for example, refuses to allow Klu 'bum to meet his daughter with the excuse that his wife is seriously ill. Instead, he suggests that Klu 'bum meet 'Bum skyid in the park. He then summons fifty soldiers and orders them to assassinate Klu 'bum. 'Bum skyid discovers the plot and rushes to the park to inform Klu 'bum, but is then killed by arrows shot by the assassins.

Klu 'bum goes insane, picks up his lover in his arms, and wades into the Lha sa River where the strong current sweeps them away.

...

Descriptions of fighting are vivid and imaginative, creating a highly entertaining, action-packed novel. Generally, Nag po skal bzang uses traditional storytelling in ways that mimic the Gesar Epic, for example characters are generally one-dimensional. Those aiding Klu 'bum are good people who care for the poor and champion justice against the wicked, who prey on and kill the weak and innocent.

There are, however, notable exceptions, for example, Lha rje 'chi bdag mthar sprod is a medical/religious practitioner who falls in love with a married woman with several children. He then takes his lover far from their home community where they settle and love each other. Time passes and the married woman misses her children so

much that she returns to her home. Lha rje 'chi bdag mthar sprod then renounces this impermanent world, takes refuge in the mountains, and refuses to treat female patients. He scolds Klu 'bum, for example, when he brings Dbyangs can khro mo to him.

The writer also uses numerous Tibetan proverbs and A mdo dialect to depict protagonists' behavior and local environments. A mdo is my first language and I particularly enjoyed the use of A mdo dialect, learning such terms as *hrag nyan* (literary Tibetan [LT], *lkog nyan*) 'eavesdrop', *sral len byos* (LT, *shugs rgyobs*) 'encouraging someone to work hard', *lag do* (LT, *lag grogs*) 'merchant's/boss's assistant', *tshugs ka med rung sdog ga* (LT, *gra sgrig ang gsar*) 'to prepare to do something', and *ko ba nyed nyed dang rtsam pa rdzi rdzi* (LT, *pham par gtong ba/dgra sogs rtsed spyad byas pa*) 'to easily defeat enemies'.

I was unfamiliar with these words and expressions before reading this book, emphasizing the value of exposing younger generations to vocabulary that is seldom heard in 2016.

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In 2013, the first volume of *The Wild Man of Klu 'bum* was published in an illustrated version. The illustrator, Klu tshang bsod nams 'bum, was born in 1976 in Ske ba Village, Mang chu (Mangqu) Town, Mang rdzong (Guinan County), Mtsho lho (Hainan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon Province. At the time of publication, he was an art teacher in Mang rdzong Nationalities Middle School.

Only volume one has an illustrated version at this writing, the content of which was not changed other than the addition of numerous illustrations that will likely make the story more appealing to a younger generation of Tibetan-language readers.

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# NON-ENGLISH TERMS

'bras spungs འབྲས་སྤྱངས།  
'bum skyid འབུམ་སྐྱིད།  
a lnga mtheb drug ཨ་ལྔ་མཐེབ་དུག།  
a mdo ཨ་མདོ།  
ba yan thang བ་ཡན་ཐང་།  
bla ma བླ་མ།  
blo bzang dge 'dun བློ་བཟང་དགེ་འདུན།  
brel sha langs pa'i mtshar gtam བེལ་ཤ་ལངས་པའི་མཚར་གཏམ།  
bsam blo 'bum thongs བསམ་བློ་འབུམ་ཐོངས།  
dar mdo དར་མདོ།  
dar mdo hwa shang དར་མདོ་ལྷ་ཤང་།  
dbyangs can khro mo དབྱངས་ཅན་ཁྲོ་མོ།  
dka' thub rtsid bu དཀའ་ཐུབ་རུའི་བུ།  
dkar mo yag དཀར་མོ་ཡག།  
dmyal zangs nang na ku re med དམུལ་ཟངས་ནང་ན་ཀུ་རེ་མེད།  
dung mgo ma དུང་མགོ་མ།  
Gesar, ge sar གེ་སར།  
Guinan 贵南  
gling rgya གླིང་རྒྱ།  
gra sgrig ang gsar ག་སྒྲིག་ཀང་གསར།  
gral gdong གལ་གདོང་།  
grib chen ha ri go mi གྲིབ་ཆེན་ཏ་རི་གོ་མི།  
Hainan 海南  
Huangnan 黄南

gzugs med skya thub གཟུགས་མེད་སྐུ་ཐུབ།  
 hrag nyan ལྷན་ཉན།  
 ka lon sbug ཀ་ལོན་སྐུག  
 khreng ching ཁྲེང་ཅིང་།  
 khri srong lde btsan ཁྲི་སྲོང་ལྡེ་བཙུན།  
 khyi rko ཁྱི་རྐོ།  
 ka li ka da ཀ་ལི་ཀ་ད།  
 ko ba nyed nyed dang rtsam pa rdzi rdzi ཀོ་བ་ཉེད་ཉེད་དང་རུ་ཙམ་པ་རྩི་རྩི།  
 klu 'bum mi rgod ལྷུ་འབུམ་མི་རྟོད།  
 klu tshang bsod nams 'bum ལྷུ་ཚང་བསོད་ནམས་འབུམ།  
 lag do ལག་དོ།  
 lag grogs ལག་གྲོགས།  
 lcags nag brag ri rtse dgu ལུགས་ནག་བྲག་རི་རྩེ་དགུ།  
 lha rje 'chi bdag mthar sprod ལྷ་རྩེ་འཆི་བདག་མཐར་སྤྲོད།  
 lkog nyan ལྷོག་ཉན།  
 mang chu མང་ཅུ།  
 mang rdzong མང་རྫོང་།  
 mang tshogs sgyu rtsal མང་ཚོགས་སྐུ་རུ་ལ།  
 Mangqu 茫曲  
 mi chung rkang mgyogs མི་ཅུང་རྒྱང་མགྲོགས།  
 mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྔོན།  
 mtsho sngon bod yig tshags par མཚོ་སྔོན་བོད་ཡིག་ཚགས་པར།  
 mtsho lho མཚོ་ལྷོ།  
 nag po skal bzang ནག་པོ་སྐལ་བཟང་།  
 ngo sta re རྟ་སྟེ།  
 pad+ma rig 'dzin པདྨ་རིག་འཛིན།  
 Padmasambhava, slob dpon pad+ma 'byung gnas སྤྲོ་བ་དཔོན་པདྨ་འབྲུང་གནས།  
 pham par gtong ba/dgra sogs rtsed spyad byas pa ཕམ་པར་གཏོང་བ་དང་དག་སོགས་  
 ཚེད་སྤྲད་བྱས་པ།  
 phyag rdor ཕྱག་རྡོར།  
 nor bu bdun spungs རོར་བུ་བདུན་སྤྲངས།  
 po ta la པོ་ཏ་ལ།  
 phun tshogs bong gseb ཕུན་ཚོགས་བོང་གསེབ།  
 Qinghai 青海  
 reb gong རེབ་གོང་།

rgya gar ba ng+da ra twa dzo+o ལྷག་ར་བ་དྲ་ར་རྩ་ལོ།  
 rma lho ལ་ལོ།  
 rtsis dpon dgra 'dul dbang phyug རྩིས་དཔོན་དག་འདུལ་དབང་ཕྱུག  
 sems skyid sgrol ma སེམས་སྦྱིད་སྦྱོལ་མ།  
 shugs rgyobs ལུགས་རྒྱུབས།  
 skyid chu སྦྱིད་ཚུ།  
 sral len byos སྒལ་ལེན་བྱོས།  
 Tongren 同仁  
 thong he ཐོང་ཧེ།  
 thun rin ཐུན་རིན།  
 rtsam pa རྩམ་པ།  
 tshugs ka med rung sdog ga ལྷགས་ཀ་མེད་རུང་སྦོག་ག།  
 thung rin ཐུང་རིན།  
 wa bstan ལ་བསྟན།  
 Wutai 五台  
 Xining 西宁  
 rab 'byor རབ་འབྱོར།  
 zi ling ཟེ་ལིང་།

REVIEW: *PHYUR BA*

Reviewed by 'Brug mo skyid འབྲུག་མོ་སྐལ། (Zhoumaoji 周毛吉,  
Qinghai Normal University 青海师范大学)



Mkha' mo rgyal མཁ་མོ་རྒྱལ། 2015. *Phyur ba* ཕུར་བ། [Dried Cheese]. Khrin tu'u ཁྲིན་ཏུ་འུ། Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang སེ་ཁྲོན་མི་རིགས་དཔེ་སྐྱུང་ཁང་། [Sichuan Nationalities Press]. 269 pp. ISBN 978-7-5409-5455-0 (paperback 35RMB)

Mkha' mo rgyal was born in Dgon gong ma Village, 'Ba' (Tongde) County, Mtsho lho (Hainan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province. While attending the Tibetan Studies College of Mtsho sngon Nationalities University she began writing. In addition to editing and translating teaching materials for primary and secondary schools, she has also published short stories and poetry (Mkha' mo rgyal, 2015).

*Phyur ba* is the first Tibetan women's novel (Robin 2016:86) and was recognized as an Outstanding Work by the Qinghai Writers Guild in 2014 (Duojiecairang and Limaoyou 2014).<sup>1</sup> The name, which translates as 'dried cheese' is a food eaten daily by many Tibetans. Made from fermented milk without cream, it is dried in the sun by women in pastoral areas. Both sweet and sour, *phyur ba* brings to mind the happiness and sadness, ups and downs, laughter and tears that life brings. It also has symbolic connotations, representing the diligence of women. The novel's title, therefore, can be understood as reflecting the emotions of the protagonist, Mdzes se. This is emphasized at the end of the novel:

As Mdzes se loosened the thread tying the bag woven from yak hair in her lap, lumps of white *phyur ba* made by Sgron dkar appeared. She put a lump into her mouth and chewed audibly. The sweet and sour that she

'Brug mo skyid. 2017. Review: *Phyur ba*. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 45:66-72.

<sup>1</sup> See <http://goo.gl/IeTCog>, accessed 13 September 2016.

had been so familiar with in childhood sank deep into her heart. A tear trickled from her cheek to her neck (269).

*Phyur ba* is set in early autumn in Brag dkar thang, a remote pastoral community. Mdzes se returns from Paris and visits Brag dkar thang and the small temple there. This is important to her because the temple appears in a picture that she had received many years earlier from Pad ma rdo rje, her former boyfriend, when she was leaving for Shanghai to undertake further studies in painting.

Mdzes se and Pad ma rdo rje fell in love when they were in college. He taught her some basics in painting and urged her to take painting classes. He also helped her get the opportunity to further her study of painting in Shanghai. The influence from Pad ma rdo rje to Mdzes se proves profound. His encouragement and support in college largely explains her interest in painting and the international fame she has gained as an artist. Their love took root in their college days and has never withered, despite Pad ma rdo rje marrying Sgron dkar, the wife of a neighbor serving a life term in prison, and Mdzes se moving to Paris with her mother to develop her career as a painter.

Mdzes se stays with Pad ma rdo rje's family while in the local community. From Uncle Thar lo, Pad ma rdo rje's father, Mdzes se learns just how much Pad ma rdo rje loves her. The small temple in the picture was dedicated to an outstanding *bla ma* who greatly influenced Pad ma rdo rje's disposition and his enthusiasm for painting. This temple is passionately valued and appreciated by the family. Pad ma rdo rje gave her the picture, indicating her irreplaceable place in his heart.

Mdzes se also comes to understand that Pad ma rdo rje took Sgron dkar as his wife due to Uncle Thar lo's arrangement and to protect his family's reputation from Sgron dkar's brothers, who accused Pad ma rdo rje of flirting with Sgron dkar. Mdzes se interacts with Sgron dkar during her stay in the home, and is touched by her gentle, caring, and diligent character.

Throughout the entire story, Pad ma rdo rje is invisible. He is in Australia studying livestock management. We learn about Pad ma

through Mdzes se's flashbacks, his father's narrations, and Pad ma's phone calls. In a sense, Mdzes se's journey to meet Pad ma rdo rje is unsuccessful. Yet, it is not without reward as she goes on pilgrimage with his family to Lha sa, completing a sacred mission that every Tibetan nomad hopes to realize in their lifetime. While there, she prays for Pad ma rdo rje and his family in front of the Jo bo, a large image in the Jo khang Temple in the center of Lha sa. This reflects the core theme of the story - love that endures in the hearts of many Tibetan women.

This deep love is evident in the lives of several female characters in the novel who have chosen to keep this powerful emotion in their hearts and memories rather than allowing it to harm their current lives and disrupt the lives of others. Tshe ring lha mo and Lha skyid, for example, have their own secret loves. Mdzes se chooses to remain unmarried, whereas Tshe ring lha mo brings up her child from a failed marriage as a single mother, and Lha skyid endures coldness from her husband, Tshe ring dbang rgyal. This behavior of hiding a secret love deep in their hearts is two-sided, concealing their true feelings and thoughts and allowing them to tolerate others. This is a major message that Mkha' mo rgyal aims to send through this story. The fictional female characters in this story typify a great number of Tibetan women in Mkha' mo rgyal's experience:

Many Tibetan women share a common value that it is improper to show and publicize their love. Instead, they keep it hidden in their hearts all their life. I have realized this since childhood through observing my sister. I want to show this kind of love from an artist's perspective to honor this great love Tibetan women have and to let the world know about it.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, such love is not exclusive to women nor is it only between men and women. Men can also feel such love, which can embrace the love of parents for children, children for parents, and the love of the Tibetan people for nature and for their traditional culture.

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://goo.gl/aW1Fbg>, accessed 13 September 2016.

This story also reflects the realities of many pastoral communities in Mtsho lho Prefecture. Numerous similarities can be seen in the story's depiction of shifts in the cultural values of the people, as well as social changes in the structures of production and reproduction in the community. Such changes in the structure of production are obvious in the resettlement of nomads in farming areas, the assignment of fields for agricultural cultivation, and the opening of small-scale businesses such as grocery stores or tailor shops. These changes are in tandem with a shift from extended to nuclear families in many communities both in herding and farming areas. Thus Mkha' mo rgyal commented in her interview:

No doubt that this novel is fiction as that is what novels are, but it is set in a particular place amid contemporary social situations at a particular time. It could be any ordinary Tibetan place with similar social circumstances.<sup>1</sup>

The resettlement of herders into towns brings unexpected changes. For example, Aunt Bde skyid's daughter, a resident of 'Brog gsar 'New Nomad Village', commits suicide after having little to do at home and becoming involved in a problematic courtship.

Another noticeable issue in the story is the county- and town-level boarding schools for nine-year compulsory education. Uncle Thar lo's grandson must leave his family and is allowed to see his parents only once a week. This sets his parents at odds with one another as the mother tries to keep the crying boy at home while his father is preparing to take him to school. His mother worries that her son will not be well cared for at school.

The establishment of the joint-stock cooperative system in agricultural and pastoral areas is also a major issue in Brag dkar thang. The community leader, Tshe grub, encourages the villagers to participate. This puzzles Uncle Thar lo and others, who recall the poverty and starvation that resulted from the cooperative systems in the 1960s to the early 1980s.

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://goo.gl/aW1Fbg>, accessed 13 September 2016.

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Tshe ring lha mo sends her son to a school in Zi ling (Xining) where everything is taught in the Chinese language in the hope that he will receive a better education. Uncle Thar lo then worries the boy will forget traditional Tibetan customs, language, and values. Other challenges dealt with in the novel include the destructive practice of collecting caterpillar fungus which causes desertification and the grassland fencing that alters the breeding of yaks and sheep. Fences reduce opportunities for the females to find stronger males to mate with, thus adversely affecting livestock quality.

Another challenge addressed is the use of Chinese language in public sectors involving the police and in court, creating communication barriers for Tibetan nomads and farmers. These issues appear throughout the story and surely resonate with readers living in similar areas. They also highlight issues for readers who might be unfamiliar with contemporary social and cultural challenges faced by many rural Tibetans.

The novel's colloquial A mdo Tibetan dialect includes vivid descriptions and the use of proverbs in poetic form. Reflecting genuine life problems and an artistic imagination, this narrative reveals challenges faced by rural Tibetan from the point of view of a young Tibetan woman who has experienced both Tibetan and Western cultures. The tension felt by many Tibetans between trusting and retaining tradition in the face of rapid social change results in hesitation and psychological, spiritual, and practical confusion. The author suggests treasuring traditional values that see compassion as an important value, and highlights the benefits of maintaining a balanced ecosystem in a society that emphasizes economic growth.

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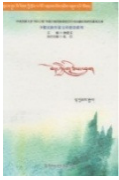
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## NON-ENGLISH TERMS

'ba' འབའ།  
 'brog gsar འབྲོག་གསར།  
 bde skyid བདེ་སྦྱིད།  
 brag dkar thang བྲག་དྲཀར་ཐང་།  
 dgon gong ma དགོན་གོང་མ།  
 Hainan 海南  
 jo bo ཇོ་བོ།  
 jo khang ཇོ་ཁང་།  
 khrin tu'u ཁིན་ཏུ་འུ།  
 lha sa ལྷ་ས།  
 lha skyid ལྷ་སྦྱིད།  
 mdzes se མཛེས་ས།  
 mkha' mo rgyal མཁའ་མོ་རྒྱལ།  
 mtsho lho མཚོ་ལྷོ།  
 mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྟོན།  
 pad ma rdo rje པད་མ་ར་དེ།  
 phyur ba ཕུར་བ།  
 Qinghai 青海  
 sgron dkar སྟོན་དྲཀར།  
 Shanghai 上海  
 Tongde 同德  
 tshe grub ཚེ་གུབ།  
 tshe ring lha mo ཚེ་རིང་ལྷ་མོ།  
 tshe ring dbang rgyal ཚེ་རིང་དབང་རྒྱལ།  
 Xining 西宁  
 zi ling ཟི་ལིང་།

REVIEW: *TIBET'S BELOVED CHILD*

Reviewed by Rinchenkhar རིན་ཆེན་མཁའ་པ་སྐྱོད་ (Independent Scholar)



Lha byams rgyal ལྷ་བླ་མ་རྒྱལ། 2012. *Bod kyi gces phrug* བོད་ཀྱི་གཅེས་ཕྱུག [Tibet's Beloved Child]. Pe cin བེ་ཅིན།: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang མི་རིགས་དཔེ་སྐྱུར་ཁང། [Nationalities Press]. 366 pages. Contents. ISBN 978-7-105-12243-1/I (paperback 24RMB).

The author, Lha byams rgyal, was born in 1977 and raised in an agro-pastoral household in Khri ka (Guide) County, Mtsho lho (Hainan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province. He attended primary school in his natal village and in due course, finished junior middle school studies. He then enrolled in Mtsho sngon Judicial Police School for four years and received a polytechnic school degree. Upon graduation, his stern father kept him at home where he herded livestock for a year. He continued to study, however, and reviewed study materials while herding and registered for the college entrance exam. His hard work earned him second place among all the Tibetan students attending the College Entrance Exam in Mtsho sngon Province, and he was accepted to the Central Nationalities University in Beijing where he received a BA and then an MA in Tibetan Language and Literature. In 2014, he earned a PhD in Ethnography at Southwest Nationalities University in Chengdu. Since 2006, he has worked as a researcher at the China Tibetology Research Center in Beijing.

Lha byams rgyal's publications include *Lam gyi nyi 'od* 'Sunlight by the Road', a collection of short stories,<sup>1</sup> *Lha byams rgyal gyi sgrung* 'bring phyogs bsgrigs 'Lha byams rgyal's Novella Collection', *Bod kyi gces phrug* 'Tibet's Beloved Child', *Nag mo khol*

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Rinchenkhar. 2017. Review: Tibet's Beloved Child. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 45:73-87.

<sup>1</sup> Classification of literary productions follows the Chinese model, i.e., *sgrung thung* 'short' (ten to fifty pages), *sgrung* 'bring' 'medium' length (fifty to 200 pages), and *sgrung ring* 'long' fictional texts (300-700 pages) (Robin 2016:1).

*gyi snyan ngag dus tshigs kun bsdus bod 'gyur ma 'Tibetan Version of Nag mo khol's Poetry Compendium: Four Seasons', Rang gi 'dod pa ltar gyi mi zhig bya'o 'As A Man Thinketh',<sup>1</sup> and A mdo'i kha skad 'Colloquial Amdo Tibetan'. He also has three online essays: *Pe cin gyi bod pa 'Beijing Tibetan', Lo de la 'That Year', and Nub kyi skar ma 'od chen 'West Starlight'.<sup>2</sup> Lha byams rgyal is among those rare authors awarded the Sbrang char literary prize "Honey Rain"<sup>3</sup> for each of his four short stories and for the novel *Tibet's Beloved Child*.**

Since 2006, he has enjoyed immense popularity as a Tibetan writer. *Sunlight by the Road*, Lha byams rgyal's first collection of twelve short stories, was published in June 2010 and garnered considerable attention from a wide readership. In 2010, he was also recognized by Rtsom pa po'i mthun tshogs 'The Union of Tibetan Writers' as one of the most influential young Tibetan novelists. Subsequently, his short story collection was included in Tsho sngon Nationalities Press's Literature Book Series and widely distributed in Tibetan areas in China.<sup>4</sup>

*Tibet's Beloved Child* is at this writing, the author's first and only long novel. It is semi-autobiographical, depicting his childhood and that of his four community friends. This serves as a vehicle to narrate the life experiences and unprecedented changes that this generation has experienced. The novel has also been translated into Japanese by Hoshi Izumi (Tokyo University) and was published in Japan in 2014 (Robin 2016:183).

Comprised of two parts, forty and twenty-seven chapters, respectively, *Tibet's Beloved Child* unfolds on a snowy morning in Mar nang tshang Village, an agro-pastoral A mdo community with snow covering every household roof, doghouse, heap of yak dung, pile of hay,

<sup>1</sup> Lha byams rgyal translated '*As a Man Thinketh*' from Chinese to Tibetan.

<sup>2</sup> www.tibetcm.com, accessed 7 June 2016.

<sup>3</sup> "Honey Rain" refers to the highest literature award for Tibetan writers. Every year the board members and judges meet, choose the best writings, and give awards to authors.

<sup>4</sup> Information in this introductory material is from Robin (2016) and from communication on 14 July 2016 that I had with the author over WeChat voice message.

and threshing ground. Mother Earth seems to have donned a long white silk robe for the new day. On this very quiet morning under a blue sky, the sound of snow melting is barely discernible amid an air of great freshness.

On this very morning, Little Boy (the protagonist) leaves footprints in the snow as he plays with other village children. It is also the morning Little Boy learns *ka*, the first letter of the Tibetan alphabet.

"Do you know what you are drawing?" Little Boy's father asks with a smile.

Little Boy suddenly stops drawing on the ground with his right foot and looks quizzically at his father, who laughs impatiently, tells him it is the letter *ka*, and murmurs to himself as he sweeps snow from off his home's flat roof, "No wonder, you are the *rnam shes* 'soul' of Uncle Tantrist" (4).

Little Boy has never before been aware of the word "soul," but rather than asking his father to explain, he runs off to look for his friends. This is the first moment in his life that Little Boy realizes the letters of the Tibetan alphabet can be written and read.

After a while, he finds and plays with other children, and teaches them how to write *ka*, although his companions are suspicious of his new claim to literacy. "How did you learn *ka*," questions Gsal sgron.

"I received Uncle Tantrist's soul," Little Boy answers, as though he understands what "soul" means. His friends are immediately satisfied with this answer, though nobody really understands what "soul" signifies.

Part One of the novel captures Little Boy's life based on his recollections and memories, particularly with his three best friends - Thar 'phel, Gsal sgron, and Nyi ma don grub. The children attend the same school and then separate, each pursuing their own dreams. Included are some of the many dramatic changes taking place in the village, e.g., relationships between people, changes in lifestyles, and increasing competition between villagers as families struggle to build the most expensive house, receive a bride from the richest family, and be the first to purchase a new bicycle.

There is no village school until Little Boy is about eight years old. Children simply roam the village lanes, near rivers, terraced mountains, valleys, and grasslands, and spend a great deal of time herding livestock in the mountains.

The long, cold winter days are often spent with Uncle Ral ba can<sup>1</sup> in front of the village temple where, in this era before television and radios, children were an eager audience for folktales and ghost stories.

The first primary school is built in Mar nang tshang in the early eighties with villagers assisting at every stage of construction. However, after the school's classrooms are built, the local government provides no teachers. Consequently, the village leader and elders invite Uncle Blo gros to be the teacher. Uncle Blo gros is a villager and had been a monk before the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Like countless other religious people, he had been forced to assume a secular identity during the period of great social turmoil.

Eventually, the four children attend the village primary school, study with other village children, and learn the Tibetan alphabet and basic arithmetic. Sometimes Uncle Blo gros tells one class to review lessons and do various tasks on the earth floor that is their blackboard. Meanwhile, he teaches another group in the classroom.

This continues until one cold morning when Little Boy's older sister and father leave for the township seat with a mule pulling a cart loaded with sacks of grain to pay the family's annual taxes. The township seat is so distant from the village that Little Boy will not venture there until he is thirteen. When they return that afternoon, they bring a young man with them - a new teacher, Mi 'gyur, a college graduate from a nearby farming village.

All the students are very excited to have the new teacher.

Time passes and Mi 'gyur falls in love with Little Boy's older sister, 'Brug skyid. Only Little Boy knows about this relationship. He delivers messages between the two lovers and receives pieces of milk candy as his reward.

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<sup>1</sup> Uncle Ral ba can is Gsal sgron's very traditional and religious grandfather and a tantric practitioner.

One spring, villagers are told to build a new temple at Mar nang Monastery. They gather and help construct the temple in the same manner as they built the village school. Common work such as building a public school and temple is an important aspect of village life that makes villagers busy and tired, but also brings joy along with the deep sense of meaning these activities entail.

The four children study diligently at school and herd livestock during the summer and winter holidays. Life goes on until the day Nyi ma don grub is put on a cow's back and led off by his grandmother, A ma Rin mo. They both disappear down a path leading to Mar nang Monastery and then, a few days later, Nyi ma don grub is recognized as an incarnation *bla ma*.

Little Boy's life changes and he misses his three friends.

Later, one summer day, Thar 'phel loses his younger brother, Kun dga tshe ring, while herding. Villagers are told that Thar 'phel went away for a short time to defecate. When he returns, Kun dga tshe ring has vanished. Thar 'phel rushes to his parents. Nearly all the able-bodied villagers quickly join the search. Toward the end of a day of searching, Teacher Mi 'gyur locates a little corpse floating in an irrigation pool by a ditch near the fields. The sound of weeping fills the sky as stories of *mi la tsi tsi*<sup>1</sup> circulate among villagers. After this incident, Thar 'phel is never again seen at school.

Little Boy's only close friend at school now is Gsal sgron.

More time passes.

Little Boy's father, the village leader, buys the first bicycle and TV in the village. The bike is frequently borrowed, which worries Little Boy's father, because he is looking forward to the day when his son can ride the bike. Therefore, he decides to hide the bike and suspends it from the ceiling of a storage room.

Soon after getting the television, many villagers come to Little Boy's home. Little Boy and his elder sister then begin charging a

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<sup>1</sup> *Mi la tsi tsi* are described as having long hair and short bodies. They like to play with children and give them beautiful flowers and toys to entice them away from family members, a development that often ends in the death of the children.

viewing fee. Eventually, no one comes to watch TV because other households buy their own TVs.

Early one morning, Uncle Blo gros and Blo brtan visit Little Boy's home holding white *kha btags*<sup>1</sup> 'strips of ceremonial silk' in their hands. They are immediately welcomed onto the hearth platform, which is reserved for important guests. Little Boy and his older sister 'Brug skyid are told to herd animals. After they have been gone for a few hours, Little Boy's second elder sister informs them that they have both been engaged that morning. 'Brug skyid is now engaged to Gsal sgron's brother, 'Brug byams. In return, Gsal sgron has been engaged to Little Boy, who is ten years old. Teacher Mi 'gyur eventually leaves the village after learning that 'Brug skyid had been forcibly married to another man.

Although he does not fully understand what it means to be engaged, Little Boy takes extra care of Gsal sgron at school, protecting her from bullies. Life continues until Little Boy and Gsal sgron are among the first class of students to graduate from the village primary school, pass exams, and enroll in the junior middle school in the county town. This is the first time the children leave their home.

Part Two focuses on the next stages of the four children's lives. Little Boy and Gsal sgron study in the same class for a total of six years in junior and senior middle school. They do not mention their engagement at school, partly because their mutually supportive relationship has become more like that of brother and sister. This relationship continues until they take the College Entrance Exam. Little Boy passes and enrolls in a university in inland China. Gsal sgron fails the exam, runs away from home, and is not heard from for years.

As for Thar 'phel, after his younger brother drowns, he relinquishes his dream of becoming a monk. He helps his parents farm and herd, marries, fathers two children, and eventually becomes the leader of Mar nang tshang Village.

Vexed by the strict rules imposed in his religious life, Nyi ma don grub dreams of leaving the monastery. Finally, he escapes one

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<sup>1</sup> A white silk scarf offered to show respect to important guests and locally significant figures, e.g., religious personalities.

morning, abandoning everything he had accumulated as an incarnation *bla ma* - his grandmother's social status, his own status as *bla ma*, wealth, and friends. After the escape, he must chant for the families he encounters on his way to Lha sa because he has no other source of income. After a few months in Lha sa, he starts a butter business and is so successful that he becomes an antique dealer and makes even more money.

At some point, Nyi ma don grub returns to Zi ling (Xining) for business purposes, but he does not go to his natal village and see his grandmother. Once, he sends his partner to his village to deliver a message to his mother and the monastery. On this trip, Nyi ma don grub and his partner collect high quality antiques and earn a lot of money. With increasing experience and success, Nyi ma don grub learns to accurately assess the price of any antique. He then remembers the old bell that called them to class at the Mar nang tshang village school. One night he and his partner go to the village school and steal the old bell,<sup>1</sup> which they then sell for five million *yuan*.

Even though he makes a great deal of money, he loses his connection to his home where his roots remain.

The reader reconnects with Gsal sgron when she encounters Nyi ma don grub in a small hotel in Lha sa. Neither recognizes the other. When Nyi ma don grub checks into a room, a hotel attendant appears and offers him a cup of tea. Later, she asks if he is lonely and offers to sleep with him for 150 RMB.

Nyi ma don grub immediately refuses.

The attendant offers a reduced price and suddenly, like a cat seizing a mouse, clutches his penis and slowly massages it. Nyi ma don grub's lust quickly grows and spreads through his entire body until he abruptly ejaculates in her palm. He gives her one hundred RMB and they spend the night together.

After a long conversation, Gsal sgron realizes that the man lying beside her is Nyi ma don grub, but she does not let on that she knows. The next morning, Nyi ma don grub awakens to find himself

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<sup>1</sup> The precise value of antique bells depends on the date made, materials used, and method of manufacture.

alone with a stack of cash on the table in his room. He does not learn the attendant was Gsal sgron until much later in the story.

Little Boy passes the college entrance exam and moves to a big, inland Chinese city for further study. After graduating, he works at an institute of Tibetology research and it then becomes difficult for him to return home.

Though twenty years pass, he is filled with nostalgia. Missing his home village and his friends, he waits every winter for snow to fall. He now works in an office, which makes it hard for him to go home very often. After marrying a Beijing Tibetan, Bstan 'dzin sgron me, it becomes almost impossible. She was born and raised in the city by parents who had lived a city life for their entire lives and she speaks no Tibetan. After marriage, he is manipulated by his wife and her family.

Little Boy is unhappy that his wife never visits his natal village, even after years of marriage. Adding to his distress is the fact that his father-in-law is the head of his office and his mother-in-law also has a good job. Both his wife's parents have powerful positions that bring high social rank. They feel that they are better than Little Boy, who grew up in a rural village and despise Little Boy's parents for being peasants. Having both parents-in-law with such good positions makes Little Boy feel that he is nothing but a very ordinary son-in-law, a feeling that is exacerbated when he is reminded that he was born in a countryside family and when Bstan 'dzin sgron me scolds him for lacking wealth and power.

One year, Nyi ma don grub happens to visit the big city where Little Boy is based. They meet, talk about their lives, recall childhood memories, and share feelings of anxiety due to not having been home for a long while.

As the novel ends, Mar nang Village is locked in a grassland dispute with a neighboring community. After one serious battle, a few locals are killed and many are wounded. Thar 'phel, a local leader, seeks advice from Little Boy, who is extremely concerned about his friends and relatives in the village. After a lengthy consultation with Gsal sgron and Nyi ma don grub, they agree on a time to meet in Zi ling to find a solution to the conflict.

On a very hot summer day in a big Chinese city, Little Boy leaves his apartment, hails a cab, and heads for the airport, like an arrow shot from a bow. Feeling boundless joy, he smiles as he gazes in the rearview mirror and notices the big city diminishing and then vanishing completely. He is getting closer to home, Mar nang Village, and his true friends.

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*Tibet's Beloved Child* provides details of childhood in an A mdo, agro-pastoral community that reflect the difficult, social-psychological realities of the 1970s-1990s. The author illustrates the lives of four children from a rural community. Each child represents a type of life that characterizes contemporary rural Tibetans: those who pass a College Entrance Examination and eventually gain a well-respected government job; those who begin a religious life but later renounce their vows and become businessmen; those who do poorly in school, escape from their home community, do business elsewhere, and eventually succeed; and those who obediently do as their parents dictate by remaining at home, marrying, having children, and caring for their parents. The novel is thus an important witness to transformations being brought about by "modernity" and "development."<sup>1</sup>

In terms of lifestyle, *Tibet's Beloved Child* contrasts the rural with the urban, and modernity with tradition. Village children have no local school, but then have a new school building, teachers, and textbooks; and storytelling as main entertainment quickly gives way to TV. Amid these dramatic transitions, Little Boy, Gsal sgron, and Nyi

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<sup>1</sup> In this context, the growing number of auto-bio-ethnographies written in English by Tibetans who were born and raised in Tibetan areas in China requires referencing, given the range of geographical areas these materials address. These works include Gongboo Sayrung (2007), Nangchukja (2011), G.yu 'brug (2012), Rin chen rdo rje (2011), Snyang lcang rgyal's (2011), Sonam Doomtso (2012), Dzorge Guru (2013), Karma Dondrub 'grub (2013), Rdo rje tshe brtan (2013), Tobs stag lha (2013), Tse ring bum (2013), Tshes beu lha mo (2013), Rka phug Rdo rje don grub and CK Stuart (2014), Pema kyi 2015, and Sangs rgyas bkra shis et al. (2015).

ma don grub's inner worlds and dreams illustrate how, despite living many years in cities, an empty space in the heart lingers where childhood memories of the place one was born in are forever alive, the eternal "home."

With respect to writing style, Lha byams rgyal uses an autobiographical stance that includes "real" events experienced by the author and those close to him. *Tibet's Beloved Child* demonstrates that the Tibetan novelist can focus on issues beyond nomad life, community conflict, the social-political turmoil of the 1950-1970s, and conventional themes such as rich man marries poor girl, desire for love that can never be obtained, hunger for fame and glory, and the cost of treachery and greed, which have been mainstays for Tibetan novelists. Such themes can be found in Stag 'bum rgyal's *Rgud 'Degeneration'*, Lhing 'jags kyi rtswa thang's *The Serene Meadow*, Mkha' mo rgyal's *Phyur ba 'Cheese'*, Tshe ring don grub's *Mes po 'Grandfather'*, *Smug pa 'Fog'*, *Rlung dmar 'ur 'ur 'The Red Wind Screams'*, and Nag po skal bzang's martial art adventure *Lum bum mi rgod 'The Wild Man of Lumbum'*.

Another distinctive feature of *Tibet's Beloved Child* is the use of language. Novels written by Ü-Tsang writers tend to have a small readership among A mdo readers and vice versa. To the extent that this is due to differences in dialect, Lha byams rgyal addresses this by using vocabulary that can be understood by literate Tibetans, regardless of their mother dialects. One example is "*Jo lags lung pa ga nas yin*" (290) "Older Brother, where are you from?" "*Jo lags khyod sa cha gang gi yin*" is said in A mdo and "*Jo lags khyod ga nas yin*" is commonly said in Kham. In this example, *jo lags* is a term of respect for addressing an older male. As used in this novel, this expression is easily comprehended by readers in most Tibetan areas of China.

When closely examined, agro-pastoral communities such as Mar nang tshang present a plethora of Tibetan cultural beliefs, lifestyles, mentalities, and personalities. For example, Uncle Ral pa can and Nyi ma don grub's grandmother (Ama rin mo) are characters whose strong cultural beliefs and temperaments make them

immediately familiar to Tibetans, regardless of herding or farming backgrounds.<sup>1</sup>

I have read this novel multiple times because its descriptions of life and emotions closely resemble many aspects of my own childhood. In fact, at times, I felt that the author was writing about me. This is testimony to the authenticity the writer captured in his fiction. The hopeful end of *Tibet's Beloved Child* suggests that we should open our arms, embrace the "home" to which we are rooted and attached (whether we like it or not), and "repay" those in need when we have the opportunity to do so.

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<sup>1</sup> Tse ring don grub's *My Two Fathers* must be mentioned here because of similarities to *Tibet's Beloved Child*. The former also employs an autobiographical perspective with "education" as a central concern. Both novels follow the life trajectories of the main characters who are Tibetans with rural upbringings attempting to survive in urban settings, and who eventually come to realize that their natal home has value that they did not appreciate.

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## NON-ENGLISH TERMS

'brug skyid འབྲུག་སྐྱིད།

a mdo ཨ་མདོ།

a mdo'i kha skad ཨ་མདོའི་ཁ་སྐད།

a ma rin mo ཨ་མ་རིན་མོ།

Beijing 北京

blo brtan ལྷོ་བརྟན།

blo gros ལྷོ་གྲོས།

bod kyi gces phrug བོད་ཀྱི་གཅེས་ཕུག

bstan 'dzin sgron me བསྟན་འཛིན་སྟོན་མེ།

Chengdu 成都

dbus gtsang དབུས་གཙང་།

gsal sgron གསལ་སྟོན།

Guide 贵德

Hainan 海南

jo lags khyod ga nas yin ཇོ་ལགས་ཀྱིད་ག་ནས་ཡིན།

jo lags lung pa ga nas yin ཇོ་ལགས་ལུང་པ་ག་ནས་ཡིན།

ka ཀ།

kha btags ཁ་བཏགས།

khri ka ཁྲི་ཀ།

kun dga' tshe ring ཀུན་དགའ་ཆེ་རིང་།

lam gyi nyi 'od ལམ་གྱི་ཉི་འོད།

lha byams rgyal gyi sgrung 'bring phyogs bsgrigs ལྷ་བྱམས་རྒྱལ་གྱི་སྟུང་འབྲིང་

ཕྱགས་བསྐྱེགས།

lha byams rgyal ལྷ་བྱམས་རྒྱལ།

Lhasa, lha sa ལྷ་ས།

lhing 'jags kyi rtswa thang ལྷིང་འཇགས་ཀྱི་སྡེ་ཐང་།

lo de la ལོ་དེ་ལ།

mar nang tshang མར་ནང་ཆང་།

mes po མེས་པོ།

mi 'gyur མི་འགྱུར།

mi la tsi tsi མི་ལ་ཙི་ཙི།

mi rigs dpe skrun khang མི་རིགས་དཔེ་སྐུན་ཁང་།

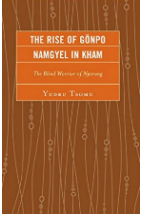
mkha' mo rgyal མཁའ་མོ་རྒྱལ།

mtsho lho མཚོ་ལྷོ།  
 mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྒོན།  
 nag mo khol gyi snyan ngag dus tshigs kun bsdus bod 'gyur ma ནག་མོ་  
 ཁོ་ཀྱི་སྒྲན་དག་དུས་ཚེས་ཀུན་བསྐྱེད་བོད་འགྱུར་མ།  
 nag po skal bzang ནག་པོ་སྐལ་བཟང་།  
 nga yi a pha gnyis ང་ཡི་ཕ་གཉིས།  
 nub kyi skar ma 'od chen ལུང་གི་སྐར་མ་འོད་ཆེན།  
 nyi ma don grub ཉི་མ་དོན་གྲུབ།  
 pe cin gyi bod pa ཤེ་ཅིན་གྱི་བོད་པ།  
 phyur ba ཕུར་བ།  
 Qinghai 青海  
 ral ba can རལ་བ་ཅན།  
 rang gi 'dod pa ltar gyi mi zhig bya'o རང་གི་འདོད་པ་ལྟར་གྱི་མི་ཞིག་བྱའོ།  
 rgud རྒུད།  
 rlung dmar 'ur 'ur རླུང་དམར་ཁུར་ཁུར།  
 rmi lam 'khrug pa'i lo རྣེ་ལམ་འཁྱུག་པའི་ལོ།  
 rtsom pa po'i mthun tshogs རྩོམ་པ་པོའི་མཐུན་ཚགས།  
 sbrang char སྤང་ཅར།  
 smug pa སྤུག་པ།  
 stag 'bum rgyal སྔག་འབུམ་རྒྱལ།  
 thar 'phel ཐར་འཕེལ།  
 tshe ring don grub ཚེ་རིང་དོན་གྲུབ།  
 Xining 西宁  
 yuan 元  
 zi ling ཟེ་ལིང་།

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 REVIEW: *THE RISE OF GÖNPO NAMGYEL IN KHAM*

Reviewed by Amy Holmes-Tagchungdarpa (Grinnell College)



Yudru Tsomu. 2015. *The Rise of Gönpö Namgyel in Kham: The Blind Warrior of Nyarong*. Lanham: Lexington, 2015, xxxiii + 365. Two maps, seven appendices, index. Studies in Modern Tibetan Culture. ISBN 978-0-7391-7792-1 (Hardcover 116USD), 978-0-7391-7793-8 (E-book 114.99USD).

Yudru Tsomu's book, *The Rise of Gönpö Namgyel in Kham: The Blind Warrior of Nyarong*, is a vitally important and inspiring work that represents a new standard not only for Eastern Tibetan history, the focus for events in the book, but also for the study of border regions of the Tibetan cultural world more generally. The way that Yudru achieves this is through a dismantling of the very idea of border region in her evocation of nineteenth-century Kham as a political, cultural, and economic center that was not simply a "buffer zone" between the neighboring states of Qing China and Ganden Podrang in Central Tibet. Yudru sees the dynamism in Kham's position within broader regional geopolitics as indicative of the shifting nature of power in East and Inner Asian history, where she argues that historians often mistake official discourse radiating out of powerful states as authoritative and overlook the complexity of "what unfolded on the ground" (xx). This is at the expense of local perspectives and agency, which remain obscured, especially in contemporary nationalist histories. In order to counter representations of Kham as merely an "in-between" on the frontiers of China and Tibet, Yudru engages with the extraordinary figure of chieftain Gönpö Namgyel (1799-1856) and his leadership behind the almost complete unification of Kham between 1836 and 1861.

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Holmes-Tagchungdarpa, Amy. 2017. Review: The Rise of Gönpö Namgyel in Kham. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 45:88-92.

The events around the rise and fall of Gönpo Namgyel represent an important and unusual moment in Kham history: born without the traditional mantles of authority in Kham society such as an inherited territory or monastic seat, he managed over a period of twenty-seven years to unite thirteen polities in eastern Tibet through gaining local support in his native Nyarong before moving on to eliminate rivals and seize other territories (57). Eventually, he challenged even the Qing and Galdan Podrang governments. Previous historians have claimed his success was due to his charisma and intelligence (58), but Yudru deftly complicates the situation by positioning Gönpo Namgyel within broader currents of local and regional historical events. She does this through the incorporation of a phenomenal set of different sources. Tibetan language sources include a wide array of dialects and genres, from local Khampa folk songs to religious biographies to the crucial contemporary eyewitness account of Gönpo Namgyel's rise by Yelé Tsültrim. Yudru is one of the first scholars to deeply mine this source, which is well complimented by Sherap Özer's 1981 account of events and other collections of materials published by local offices in contemporary Sichuan.

Her Chinese language sources are similarly impressive, and include official sources from the Qing government, as well as gazetteers and local histories from the Republican and post-1949 periods. Yudru also draws on a wide variety of secondary sources, including scholarship from the New Qing History and borderland histories. She invokes the work of American historian Richard White in an especially creative way to sketch out the "middle ground" that existed between the Qing court and the kingdoms and states of Kham that was defined through negotiation, rather than a top-down, center-periphery approach (25). The eight chapters that make up her study each outline the factors that led to Gönpo Namgyel's success, and also trace his decline and legacy.

After the Introduction that outlines Yudru's approach to re-centering local history, Chapter One, "Kham in the Nineteenth Century: Land, People and Politics," elaborates on that local history and is a significant contribution to our understanding of eastern Tibetan

history on its own. The chapter includes an outline of the topographical and political diversity of Kham, with the author providing vivid description of Kham's rugged mountainous barriers, complex kingdoms, and monastic polities. Here, Yudru outlines the dynamic relations between these polities and the Qing and Lhasa governments, demonstrating how neither managed to gain absolute authority in the region, and how it was only through negotiation between local rulers and these centers that elements of the "official middle ground" such as the Qing *tusi* system managed to have any influence.

Chapter Two, "Crisis of the Centers: Qing China and Central Tibet," outlines the broader picture of Qing-Lhasa relations and events in the nineteenth century that facilitated the success of Gönpo Namgyel. Yudru argues that to the east, factors such as the popularity of opium, the growth in population, rebellions, and natural disasters, all contributed to the weakening of the Qing in Kham. Looking westward, the nineteenth century was also a turbulent time for the Galdan Podrang government, with conflicts over succession of power and wars in the Himalayas, all leading to a vacuum of authority in Kham, which Gönpo Namgyel stepped into.

Chapter Three, "Nyarong: The Iron Knot of Tibet," changes scale again, zooming in on Nyarong, the polity Gönpo Namgyel came from, to examine how local conditions, including cultural values of family honor and revenge feuds, social structure, and local history all contributed to his ascendancy.

Chapter Four, "The Blind Man from Nyarong," introduces us to Gönpo Namgyel and his connections to Nyarong society, providing an overview of his family, childhood, ambivalent relationship with Buddhism, and obligatory participation in local honor codes. This chapter demonstrates how "[n]o single cause or factor served as the decisive element paving the way for Gönpo Namgyel's rise and expansion" (109). Instead, it posits that it was through a confluence of factors and events, including military prowess gained in local battles and the preoccupation of the Qing and Lhasa governments with issues far from Kham that allowed for a figure like Gönpo to "realize his personal ambition" (109).

Chapters Five through Seven outline what this realization looked like. Surrounded by local support, Gönpo Namgyel managed to unite Nyarong, which led neighboring areas to petition the amban for intervention against Gönpo's armies (136-137). However, military intervention by the Qing was not successful, which led Gönpo Namgyel to gain a region-wide reputation as "the chief whom neither the Chinese nor the Tibetan could defeat..." (148). Over the following decade, he expanded his rule over much of Kham, and began to eye areas beyond, in Lhasa and Qing-controlled territories.

Greatly concerned, the Lhasa Government launched fierce campaigns against Gönpo Namgyel, which were eventually successful and led to his death and the end of his extraordinary career in 1865. The Qing were also concerned, but despite historical representation of the subduing of Gönpo Namgyel as a Qing-Lhasa collaboration, they were less involved due to other pressing events taking place in China (206-207, 211).

The final chapter, "Contention over the Sphere of Influence in Kham," outlines the aftermath of Gönpo Namgyel's death and his legacy. The Lhasa government response to his campaigns led Lhasa to extend their influence into Kham, but there were still disputes over authority in the region with the Qing (233) and later with the Nationalist government (237-238). In this chapter and her conclusion, Yudru demonstrates how the local aspirations of Gönpo Namgyel had serious repercussions for Sino-Tibetan relations through its unsettling of center-periphery power relations (252). As she states, Kham remained fragmented into the twentieth century due to its political diversity, geographical complexity, and cultural practices, all facets of the need for a "middle ground" with outside forces. It was only in 1949 that Kham was finally incorporated into a nation state, the People's Republic of China.

Yudru Tsomu's vivid representation of Gönpo Namgyel's career greatly enriches our understanding of Kham's history through her attention to myriad source materials and local histories, and is therefore invaluable to scholars of Tibetan history and culture, especially working on frontier areas. Her accessible writing style and

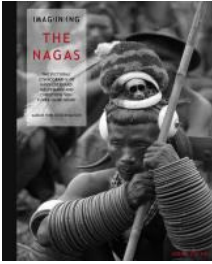
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lively evocation of key events makes her work appropriate for advanced undergraduate and graduate students, as well as general audiences interested in Tibetan history and culture. However, this detailed work is also an important challenge to scholars of New Qing History, a methodology that has added important nuance to the study of Chinese history. While New Qing historians have called on scholars of Chinese history to engage with the multilingual archive of the multicultural Qing empire, scholarship still tends to be China-centered. Yudru's work instead resists centralized visions of history through her prioritization of Tibetan language sources and Khampa, and even more specifically, Nyarong perspectives. She argues that, "[t]here is no single maker of history and locals are not mere observers of national events" (252). This key point makes Yudru's book a vital contribution beyond Sino-Tibetan history in the field of the global history of frontiers.

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 REVIEW: *IMAG(IN)ING THE NAGAS*

Reviewed by Mark Bender (The Ohio State University)<sup>1</sup>



Stockhausen, Alban von (2014). *Imag(in)ing the Nagas: A Pictorial Ethnography of Hans-Eberhard Kauffmann and Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf*. Vienna and Stuttgart: Arnoldsche Art Publishers. 452 pages, 400 illustrations in color and black and white, maps, bibliography, ISBN 978-3-89790-412-5 (hardback 58£).

This beautifully executed work is a reexamination of thousands of photographic images of Naga peoples from North East India collected by Hans-Eberhard Kaufmann (1899-1986) and the ground-breaking visual anthropologist Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf (1909-1995). The book cover is dominated by the arresting image of a brooding man, crouching in full warrior garb consisting of rattan loops covering his forearms, hands clutching the bamboo shaft of a spear, bone arm bands about his triceps, wild boar tusks framing a tiny monkey skull and cluster of feathers atop his head, and large bone or shell discs above his ears. His eyes seem intently fixed on something outside the frame. This image seems to convey a way of life now regulated by politics and technologies beyond the purvey of the uplands, an image that appeals to modern sensibilities towards the wild and untamed.

By flipping to the frontispiece, the reader encounters another image from this upland realm of the past, that of a young woman clad in strings of beads around her neck, beaded arm bands, and silver earring loops. Her head cocked slightly to one side, she seems to gaze directly into the lens, and into the eyes of the beholder. The back cover shows a close-up of a larger image that appears inside the volume. It is a beatific image of the face of a Naga woman gazing, seemingly, past the camera into the distance. The ethnographer Furer-Haimendorf

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Bender, Mark. 2017. Review: *Imag(in)ing the Nagas*. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 45:93-97.

subjectively described the face as the most beautiful he encountered among the Naga.

The author, Alban von Stockhausen, has taken material assembled for a university thesis - which includes samples from over 5,700 images - and in concert with Arnoldsche Publishers has crafted a text that is both visually and theoretically stimulating. As a form of visual anthropology, the work utilizes innovative strategies to allow readers to examine the photographic shadows of Naga cultures in the mid-1930s from the vantage point of contemporary visual theory. While the author has presented information on every accessible collection of Naga photographs in the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, and other European archives, the focus of the volume is the collections of the two German ethnographers who were active on expeditions (detailed in the volume) to a portion of present India that now borders on China to the north, Myanmar to the east, Bangladesh to the west, and is connected in the northwest to mainland India by a tiny corridor of land.

A multi-ethnic area, North East India is comprised of seven states in which dwell over 200 ethnic groups, many of which speak Tibeto-Burman languages. Among the Tibeto-Burman speakers are the Naga, who have over thirty cultural subgroupings such as the Ao, Angami, Tangkhul, Sema, Sangtam, Chang, Konyak, and Lotha. Many Naga live in the state of Nagaland, founded in 1963, which has a population of about two million. Nagas also live in surrounding states including Manipur, Meghalaya, and Arunachal Pradesh, as well as the country of Myanmar. Furer-Haimendorf and Kauffmann (whose work was nearly unknown until Stockhausen's research) were documenting a society that had already felt the influences of British Colonial rule and Christian missionaries since the nineteenth century, and today faces encroachment by other ethnic groups, the social and environmental impacts of government development projects, increased population pressures, and globalization that further alters what remains of the cultural life ways that drew the German photographers halfway across the globe.

Many of the images presented in the work are accompanied by comments of Furer-Haimendorf and other ethnographers (Kauffmann's written materials have been lost) utilized by Stockhausen that belie a romantic subjectivity towards indigenous peoples that persists even today. On page 157 is an image of two "Chang warriors" utilized on a Christmas card in 1936, which Stockhausen notes was one of Furer-Haimendorf's favorite images. He is quoted as saying, "Never have I seen more magnificent Nagas than these Chang men, whose athletic bodies were of perfect proportions."

Images of young women were produced by both Furer-Haimendorf and Kauffmann. In one instance, they photographed the same young woman simultaneously, and an image of Henlong, known as the "Belle of Wakching" was included in *The Naked Nagas* (published in 1946), with a print version of the image on the dust jacket of the pictorial book. Stockhausen provides background information on the photo shoot, based on his archival research. Frames from both photographers, juxtaposed on the page, show snippets of the process, include Henlong "giggling" (161) in the moments before she removes her shawl and poses "holding her hands behind her head and pushing out her upper body" (162). The author notes that this and other images appealed to the imaginations of both the photographers and exemplified the "inherent eroticism that was usually associated with 'archaic ' tribes by the European public" (161).

Among the photographs positioned throughout the text are other intense portraits of Naga women, men at work constructing a ritual drum, scenes of daily life activities, and objects of every dimension of material culture. A key part of the reengagement with these photos was the author's presentation of the images to the local communities where the images were originally taken mostly in 1936-1937 during a trip in late 2007. The images of young Nagas examining the ethnographic photos on a laptop computer contrasts with the observation that many of the older Naga could identify people they knew in the photos, but could only find themselves by a process of elimination. This was because none of the locals had photographs from

that far in the past and the subjects did not know what they looked like as children.

The outstanding contribution of this volume is the chapters with photographs and supporting contextual commentary on Naga vernacular culture of the era and the use of the camera. For instance, Chapter 7.2 entitled, "The Naga Village and its Architecture," has many examples of Naga material culture and people hard at work in a variety of tasks that support family and community as documented by the photographers. From the perspective of visual anthropology Stockhausen, as elsewhere in the volume, takes care in reconstructing camera angles and provides comments on composition and technique. For instance, in the description of Kohima village, now a major city in Nagaland, he describes how Kauffmann found a vantage point above the already large village and later combined three images into a "panoramic view," and "used the wide panorama format to convey his own astonishment at the size of Kohima village" (251).

The author also provides fine-grained detail on the images, noting that traditional thatched roofs were already few, displaced by tin sheeting, and some covered with small shingles, probably of "flattened cans." Moreover, he notes, "Deforestation was already quite advanced: a few highly developed trees show how high the forests must have been beforehand" (251). The background information, supplied in part from the photographers' accounts, can go into even greater detail regarding traditional practices. In a description of a Konyak home in northeast Nagaland, the treatment of the thatched roof dwelling includes the information that, "To keep the vast roofs free of harmful insects, sometimes a special type of ants are put inside specially made nests on the roof" (255) that in concert with smoke destroys the larvae.

This mix of image and interpretive ethnographic comment covers nearly every dimension of traditional life as represented in the photographic collections. As the author notes, the collection is also important for the perspective offered by the German photographers. The images shot with state-of-the-art German equipment provides an alternate viewpoint from that of images throughout the British colonial

era (415). The volume compliments images and text in such works as Peter van Ham and Jamie Saul's *Expedition Naga: Diaries from the Hills in Northeast India: 1921-1937, 2002-2006* (2008), Stuart Blackburn's *Tribal Cultures in the Eastern Himalayas: Photographs of Arunachal Pradesh, 1859-2006* (2008), and Julian Jacobs and Alban von Stockhausen's *The Nagas: Hill Peoples of Northeast India* (2012).

In all, Stockhausen's stunningly wrought work is valuable both for its interpretation and contextualization of iconic images of Naga cultures and the valuable information on the various projects to document Naga lifeways on film. In its insights into decoding ethnographic visual imagery in decades old photographic images the volume will be an inspiration and model for projects on other cultures and those that imagine them.

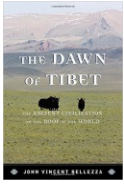
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 REVIEW: *THE DAWN OF TIBET*

Reviewed by Ivette M. Vargas-O'Bryan (Austin College)



John Vincent Bellezza. 2014. *The Dawn of Tibet: The Ancient Civilization on the Roof of the World*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014. ix + 347pp, 4 maps, 3 tables, 45 illustrations. ISBN 978-1-4422-3461-1 (hardback 39USD).

If you want to learn more about the pre-Buddhist heritage of Tibet and the Western Himalayas, one name stands out: John Vincent Bellezza. Unlike any other, we encounter a uniqueness in Bellezza's works, a breadth of detail, insight, and personal struggle that has been unsurpassed in archaeology and Tibetan Studies these days. Bellezza's numerous publications that include such groundbreaking works as *Divine Dyads* (1997), *Calling Down the Gods* (2005), the significant contributions of *Zhang Zhung: Foundations of Civilization in Tibet* (2008), *Death and Beyond in Ancient Tibet*, and the critical two volume set, *Antiquities of Zhang Zhung* (2010), have provided robust studies on Tibet's pre-Buddhist heritage in an unconventional style that at once incorporates his skills as an archaeologist with one of cultural historian, anthropologist, travel journalist, explorer, and storyteller.

When I read this new work, my assumptions about Tibet as a land whose colorful history and civilization was most impacted by Buddhism shortly after the seventh century were shaken again. My attention was drawn to periods long before the Buddhist presence revealed through forgotten lands, writings, and ritual customs that point to a Tibetan civilization far more ancient, complex, and historically important on a global scale than I could have imagined. Presenting such complexity does come with a price because Bellezza's integrative, ambitious approach has its complications. Yet his

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<sup>1</sup> Vargas-O'Bryan, Ivette M. 2017. Review: The Dawn of Tibet. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 45:98-104.

unwillingness to restrict himself to the strictures and disciplinary boundaries of academia order to find answers on the ground, and to assert challenging connections may reveal some treasures of the past.

From the very beginning in *The Dawn of Tibet*, Bellezza is particularly interested in the civilization known to Tibetan tradition as Zhang Zhung, which was based in western Tibet, also known as Upper Tibet. However, his search and discoveries go further back to a time that pre-dates and yet, impacts this mysterious civilization. This synthesis in ten chapters of his previous studies also provides a progression of his theories and an increasingly systematic documentation of findings following and surpassing other archaeologists and anthropologists before him. It also highlights the impact of Western and Chinese scholars and expeditions. The book begins with a brief synopsis of his personal history of exploration in Tibet and his documentation of around 700 sites. His documentation of monuments, rock art, and ruins are linked with old literary tales and contemporary ritual customs that form the basis for the history and culture of pre-Zhang Zhung and the Zhang Zhung civilization.

The second and third chapters introduce the geography and people of Upper Tibet with summaries of his observations. The *drokpas* loom large in his study; this hearty group of tent-dwelling people live in an often harsh and unpredictable region, herding yaks, sheep, and goats. The *shingpas* are distinguished from the *drokpas*, providing an example of farming subsistence living, a contrast to the itinerant lifestyle traditions of the *drokpas*. Bellezza begins making correspondences already by noting that ritual practices performed by *lhapa* have some similarities to ancient practices found in Upper Tibet.

It is not until Chapter Four that we get an introduction to the Zhang Zhung kingdom based, for the most part, on Eternal Bon literature and mythological narratives of culture heroes such as *Zhang Zhung Nyen Gyu* and other texts, as well as legends collected in his research. Also so-called spirits (gods, demons such as *dre*, *klu*, and *sri*) are linked in fascinating ways with the archaeological sites and people of Upper Tibet. Here, he also recounts from sources like the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* the periods of Zhang Zhung reign that corresponded

to Buddhist rule in central and other areas of Tibet. Especially intriguing are Bellezza's attempts to trace Olmolungring, which is known to be linked to the mythical Shambhala and Kalachakra (according to Martin 1995) and to actual locations within and outside Tibet. The significance of this is also linked with Tibet's global influence in ancient times predating the influx of Buddhism. In this chapter Bellezza seems to be particularly concerned with making sure the reader understands the application of modern Eternal Bon theories to the history of its tradition, especially because of the sparse older evidence available. His brief compilation of myths, rituals, and sites to the vast array of Tibetan tribes over the ages provides theoretical challenges.

The next three chapters provide a dense summary of his findings on castles, burial grounds, rock paintings, and artifacts connecting past and current research. First, Bellezza documents the ruins of archaic castles and temples for clues on the inhabitants of the area with the awareness that their pastoral lifestyle likely inclined them to inhabit "caves, portable shelters, and rudimentary stone houses" (123). Then, he presents evidence of stone age tools and a variety of social spheres ("acropolises, palaces, temples, hermitages, and villages") (115). He also attempts to understand funerary sites and mortuary monuments and studies the prolific art forms of rock paintings and carvings, including metallic objects. These studies collectively provide evidence for his later assertions of the development of pre-Buddhist Tibetan civilization. These chapters specifically highlight how under-researched this region is despite the plethora of extant monuments and artifacts, as well as historical information on former monuments.

Scholars interested in the use of animals in Tibetan culture and religion and the links between myths, legends, and medical texts will find chapters Seven and Eight particularly helpful. Research on the appearance of animals that figure in Buddhist literature and medical texts would be greatly facilitated by a comparative study of the archaeological and comparative textual evidence that Bellezza

provides in his studies. Such medical and even biographical sources could be fruitfully informed by these other documents.

In chapters Eight and Nine, Bellezza attempts to make some concrete connections between the past and present or what he calls, prehistory and history. He puts himself out on a limb when he draws together the literature of the early Bonpo and Dunhuang manuscripts on funerals and other rituals and connects them to ancient sites, artifacts, and the still-extant spirit possession rituals. He also takes several steps toward finding correlations of details between so-called Zhang Zhung or Upper Tibetan regional structures (platforms, for example) and Buddhist ("Lamaist") structures, e.g., *chortens*. It is clear that these comparisons are painstakingly difficult undertakings that point to the need for further research and accumulation of evidence.

This work presents some exciting possibilities that in certain cases encourages research beyond what Bellezza is able to provide. Perhaps this work evokes a message that scholars in Tibetan and Buddhist Studies should go beyond their narrow disciplines and perspectives and take the time to encounter and study the textual documents and archaeological evidence that Bellezza draws from in order to get a more robust sense of Tibetan history and culture. For example, my studies on *klu* disease and rituals in the *Rgyud bzhi* and *klu* figures in the *Klu 'Bum* could potentially benefit from drawing on Eternal Bon material, pre-Buddhist mythological documents, findings at archaeological sites, and contemporary rituals of Upper Tibetan inhabitants. Medical texts and Buddhist narratives are limited in their coverage of interpretations of animal figures and clan rituals. Expanding our horizons to the archaeological findings that Bellezza has documented provides another level of evidence that could potentially add to textual and historical documents.

Bellezza's previous work has not been immune to criticism (Kvaerne 2015). His disparate material is often held together to justify his speculations and theories, especially on reconstructing the Zhang Zhung civilization. He does make some theoretical assertions based on speculations or "leaps of faith" about correlations between past and

present, textual and archaeological evidence, and even utilizing materials that post-date Zhang Zhung by several centuries. An example of this is when he comments on the Dunhuang material, "Unmistakably, this Pt 1136 origin tale alludes to a prehistoric phase in the culture of Upper Tibet" (235).

How reliable are these later materials in order to understand a hidden past? In addition, very little direct information is provided on how his work compares to those of others, especially the recent excavations by Chinese teams. These other findings may fill in some critical gaps and uncertainties in Bellezza's work.

In this work, Bellezza has been careful to distinguish earlier and later uses of Bon and shifting meanings of the tradition (7-8) and how Eternal Bon can be useful to understanding former traditions. However, this work also points to the considerable obstacles that exist in piecing together diverse evidence of various periods in order to understand a past that right now has sparse direct textual and historical correspondences. Perhaps one special insight Bellezza has given readers and scholars is that we need to push back our views of Tibetan civilization to a time when it was not dominated by Buddhist discourse. Conducting detailed comparative studies of both Buddhist and pre-Buddhist materials may reveal possible correspondences.

Overall, *The Dawn of Tibet* presents the cumulative efforts and progression of a seasoned scholar going beyond what archaeology is able to provide, armed with the support of literature, history, religion, and ritual customs. This is a work for a general audience and is a more palatable read than his past works. *The Dawn of Tibet* takes the reader on a journey that is not one of linearity, but one that spreads out in several directions until meeting at one point. It also has much to offer the scholar with its insights on Tibetan civilization and thus stretches beyond the confines of the familiar, creating a complex journey of discovery.

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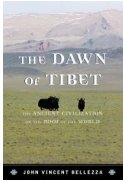
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REVIEW: *THE DAWN OF TIBET*

Reviewed by Chelsea McGill (Independent Researcher)



Bellezza, John Vincent. 2014. *The Dawn of Tibet: The Ancient Civilization on the Roof of the World*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield. Xi +349. Four maps, black-and-white illustrations, bibliography, index. ISBN 978-1442234611 (hardback 39USD).

Since 1983, John Vincent Bellezza has made numerous treks into Upper Tibet, the cold, northern Plateau region in the Himalayas. In his excursions, he has discovered the remains of a thriving civilization in what is now considered one of the most difficult climates on earth. *The Dawn of Tibet* draws upon textual sources, ethnographic study with the people who live in Upper Tibet today, and his discoveries of archaeological sites to draw a multifaceted picture of what Zhang Zhung, as this civilization is referred to, might have looked like. His analysis is divided into ten chapters, each dealing with a separate kind of material.

After a short introduction to Upper Tibet, accompanied by some very vague, generalized maps - the only ones included in this book - his first chapter describes earlier scholarly work done in this area and the fieldwork the author has undertaken since the 1980s. According to Bellezza, it was normal for explorers to wander around Tibet without permission thirty years ago. This is how he made some of his early discoveries. More recently, he has undertaken several planned research missions with Tibetan colleagues to explore the more desolate regions of the Upper Plateau.

Chapter Two serves as an introduction to the geography of Upper Tibet, including the flora and fauna, while Chapter Three provides detailed ethnographic data about the people living in Upper Tibet today, both the *drokpa* 'herders' and the *shingpa* 'farmers'.

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McGill, Chelsea. 2017. Review: *The Dawn of Tibet*. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 45:105-110.

While this ethnographic data could be helpful for anyone desiring details about life in Upper Tibet, Bellezza writes in a non-reflexive way that sometimes comes across as demeaning. For example, the section "Human Minds and Animal Spirits" begins with the following description: "Where there are drokpas, there is livestock. The two are inseparably linked in a covenant sealed in ancient times" (59). While poetic, the overall effect of this writing style is to render the people of Upper Tibet as exotic, mystical beings who are directly connected to the ancient past - something that is, to say the least, extremely problematic.

The fourth chapter introduces small bits of information about Zhang Zhung that can be gleaned from the scriptures of the present-day religious traditions of Eternal Bon and Tibetan Buddhism (which he considers the "Lamaist" traditions to differentiate them from the pre-Buddhist Tibetan traditions). While this attempt at reconstructing the pre-historic political sphere is admirable, this chapter is almost unreadable for anyone who is not already familiar with these texts. This is particularly true for the section in which he attempts to reconstruct the royal lineage of Zhang Zhung. The most helpful part of this chapter is the author's comparisons of cities, temples, castles, and so on that are mentioned in these texts with sites that he has located. He does not, however, provide maps or other images that would help the reader to locate them.

Chapter Five details where and what kind of archaeological remains have been identified. Zhang Zhung architectural styles have a few idiosyncratic elements adapted to the environment of the region. These include all-stone architecture with very thick walls; small doors, passageways, and rooms; and roofs made entirely of stone. Some of these stone buildings have survived intact, and this book provides pictures that adequately demonstrate this form of architecture. Some of the most impressive sites are castles and military fortifications, with huge walls situated along defensible mountain ridges. At these sites, the author has also identified smaller, more rudimentary stone houses located in the valley where farmers or herders probably lived under the eye of the military or rulers. The author also discusses the buildings he

considers to be temples or hermitages, which are smaller and located in remote areas. There also seem to be examples of these remote buildings that were used as royal residences, however, so I am unsure on what basis he has classified them as one or the other.

The following chapter discusses the variety of tomb and funerary architecture found in Upper Tibet. One rather common variety is standing stones, or pillars, surrounded by graves and located in barren areas. Other tombs are built in the same way as the residential and ruling buildings described in the previous chapter, including thick walls and all-stone architecture. One very interesting observation is the comparison of these permanent burial sites with modern-day Tibetan Buddhist funerary rites, usually called sky burial, which leave no real archaeological remains (154). It is perhaps this comparison that best highlights the difference between Buddhist and pre-Buddhist society in the area. The author also mentions that the wide variety of burial forms indicates social stratification (158), but I would note that the chronological sequence of these finds is unclear. It is possible that funerary architecture changed significantly over time, so the wide variety of burials could indicate both social stratification and social change. At the end of the chapter, the author notes that many of these sites have been looted in recent times and that the Chinese government has done little, if anything, to protect them (165-166).

The seventh chapter deals with other remains of the ancient cultures of Upper Tibet, specifically the rock art (both petroglyphs and pictographs) and metal artifacts. In his travels, the author has documented a wide variety of rock art, and he notes a few general categories: animals, anthropomorphic, swastikas and temples, etc. Surprisingly, this chapter is accompanied by very few pictures. The ones which are included are all in low-resolution black-and-white, making it difficult to understand exactly what the author is trying to demonstrate. His assumptions about the nature of these artistic forms should also be taken with a grain of salt, since apart from the obvious designs it is very difficult to know whether these were in fact intended for religious or other purposes. One fascinating section noted that the

swastikas used by Eternal Bon and Tibetan Buddhist devotees turn in opposite directions, and that there are several examples of one group destroying the symbols of the other religion and covering them with their own (174-175). As for the metal artifacts, the author simply gives a catalog of the various finds that range from iron models of temples to weapons to beautifully fine fibulas, probably used as broaches or medallions.

In the eighth chapter, Bellezza returns to the textual sources to attempt a reconstruction of the pre-Lamaist religious practices of Upper Tibet. From the written texts, it is evident that the introduction of Buddhism to Tibet caused major cultural and religious changes; the Eternal Bon religion is, in fact, a combination of pre-Buddhist and Buddhist beliefs (205-206). Both Eternal Bon and Tibetan Buddhism lumped the diverse earlier religious practices of the region into a single category, "bon" (203). Bellezza traces the development of several Eternal Bon personalities, including the reputed founder of the religion, Tompa Shenrab, and the powerful god, Gekho, from the earliest available texts written in obscure Old Tibetan to the more recent Eternal Bon and Tibetan Buddhist textual sources. In what is the most convincing argument of the entire book, the author argues that the most definitive change brought about by the advent of Lamaism was the abandonment of ritual animal sacrifice, which seems to have been an important aspect of pre-Buddhist religious practices.

The penultimate chapter also taps into the textual sources to discover the remaining information about Zhang Zhung culture. As the author points out, "a broad survey of recurring themes and fundamental motifs" reveals several patterns that are clearly different from the Lamaist traditions of later years (248). Of these, the most important is the "martial predilections" of the early priests, who are depicted as "vigorously involved in military affairs of state" (249). Many of the descriptions of these archaic era priests feature detailed descriptions of battles or arrays of weapons, many of which seem to draw upon the iconography of archaic-era gods and goddesses, as described in the previous chapter (250). Bellezza goes further to assert that political and religious authorities seem to have supported each

other, as also indicated by the similarities between palace and temple architecture that he has seen in the archaeological record (253-254). He also describes a material culture that is significantly different from Lamaist forms, which involves many lavish gifts given by the king, including clothing made from the skins of tigers, leopards, and clouded leopards (263-264). Another indication of the warlike culture of ancient Zhang Zhung is the extensive description and classification of weapons and armor (264-269).

The last chapter concerns present-day rituals carried out by both the laypeople and shamans of Upper Tibet. Bellezza contends that these rituals indicate "a cultural conservatism that is probably more pronounced than anywhere else in the Tibetan cultural world," and he proceeds to make connections between several present-day rituals and their ancient forbears (as described in the textual sources) (272). Of these, the most convincing is the continuation of shamans' medium rituals, although it is unclear whether the present-day ritual forms directly correspond to those practiced in Zhang Zhung.

This book provides a survey of all available evidence, which provides tantalizing hints of possible connections and ideas for future research. However, much of this data is presented in a way that makes it difficult to understand exactly what the author is suggesting. More detailed maps, sketches of archaeological sites, and better quality, color photos should have been included - it is unclear why they were not. Color photos are especially needed for the otherwise fascinating discussion of rock art. The long discussion of obscure texts is also not presented in a way that can be easily used, at least for someone lacking a background in Eternal Bon literature.

Of deeper concern is the ease with which the author moves between ancient textual sources and modern-day ethnographic data. While it does seem that there are significant connections between archaic era traditions and the lives of people in present-day Upper Tibet, it seems to be at least naïve and at most irresponsible to draw such direct lines between practices from different time periods. This study would have had adequate data based on the archaeological and textual evidence. I do not understand why the ethnographic data was

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brought in at all. Instead of incorporating this present-day data, it would have been better to have written two separate monographs: one establishing the archaeological and textual evidence regarding Zhang Zhung and another discussing the ethnographic data and its possible connections to earlier traditions. As it is, this book tries to do too much at once, resulting in an often confusing collection of details which may or may not be related.

The ideal audience for this book is scholars who have a background in Ancient Tibetan religious texts and/or the present-day culture of the region, and who are searching for research ideas. *The Dawn of Tibet* brims with ideas for future research, while presenting few valid conclusions of its own.

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 REVIEW: *BRIGHT BLUE HIGHLAND BARLEY*

Reviewed by Limusishiden (Li Dechun 李得春, Joint Surgery Department, Qinghai University Affiliated Hospital)



Li Zhuoma 李卓玛. 2016. *Walan qingke* 瓦蓝青稞 [*Bright Blue Highland Barley*]. Xining 西宁: Qinghai renmin chubanshe 青海人民出版社 [Qinghai People's Press]. 263pp. ISBN 978-7-225-05036-2 (hardback 26RMB).

The Mongghul (Tu) population in Huzhu Mongghul Autonomous County was 62,745, according to the county's official website<sup>1</sup> as reported in 2013. Qinghai Province's total Tu population was reported as 204,413<sup>2</sup> in 2013. Located in east central Qinghai, the Mongghul are deeply influenced by Tibetan Buddhism and speak dialects that have many similarities to the Mongolian language.

Literary productions by Tu writers include:

- Bao Yizhi (b. 1951), a Mangghuer native of Baojia Village, Guanting Town, Minhe Hui and Tu Autonomous County and the author of *Shuimogoulide zuihou yipan shuimo* 'Mill Valley's Last Mill'; *Heimudan, baimudan, hongmudan* 'Black Peony, White Peony, Red Peony', and *Wuyede niujiaohao* 'Mournful Ox Horn'.
- Shi Yanzhi (1966-2008), a native of Shijia Village, Halazhigou Township, Huzhu County. He had a Mongghul mother, but did not speak Mongghul. His poetry includes *Meigui jiayuan* 'Rose Homeland'.
- Qi Jianqing (b. 1956), a native of Yatou Village, Wei yuan Town, Huzhu County is the author of a collection of essays entitled *Yushu linfeng* 'A Jade Tree in the Wind'. He does not speak Mongghul.
- Lü Xia (b. 1966), a Mangghuer native from Lǔjia Village,

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Limusishiden. 2017. Review: Bright Blue Highland Barley. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 45:111-121.

<sup>1</sup> <http://goo.gl/kgTMg5>, accessed 17 March 2013.

<sup>2</sup> <http://goo.gl/VMhIf8>, accessed 17 March 2013.

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Zhongchuan Township, Minhe County is the author of a collection of poems entitled *Wode heliu 'My Rivers'*.

These writers have used the Chinese language to write about life in Qinghai that lacks distinctive local ethnic characteristics. Consequently, Li Zhuoma's publication of *Bright Blue Highland Barley* becomes the first Chinese-language novel featuring Mongghul cultural content, e.g., settings, characters, rituals, and so on in the context of love affairs, business conflicts, joys, hatred, and sorrows<sup>1</sup> among the Bai, Ji, Qi, and Lin Mongghul families who lived in a town in a Mongghul area from 1978 to 2015.

Li Zhuoma, from Zanghqua (Sangshige)<sup>2</sup> Mongghul Village, Wushi Town, Huzhu Mongghul Autonomous County, is fluent in Mongghul, and works as a writer in the Huzhu Literary Federation. This novel can be divided into two parts. The first half - before page 180 - features Mongghul rituals, costume, songs, and traditional Mongghul lives. The readers are able to learn a great deal about Mongghul culture and better understand who the Mongghul were/are. I discuss the second half of the book later.

The novel begins in the early spring of 1978 when Sunba (Songba) of the Bai Family sadly bids farewell to his beloved girlfriend, Ji Linghua. He assures her that she is forever in his heart and asks her to wait for him until his return. He then sets out for Shanxi Province to visit his uncle, who had fled to avoid being conscripted into General Ma Bufang's (1903-1975) army.

After Sunba's departure, Ji Linghua misses him day and night. Meanwhile, Qi Xinglong of the Qi Family, who operates a very

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<sup>1</sup> I and my wife, Jugui, wrote a novel entitled *Passions and Colored Sleeves: Mongghul Lives in Eastern Tibet* in English that was published in 2010 in *Asian Highland Perspectives*. We strove, using information we both gathered from our respective Mongghul families over the years, to present the lives and times of actual people in real contexts that include Mongghul religious specialists, kinship, marriage patterns, end of life rituals, and authority structures as they were known and functioned.

<sup>2</sup> The text uses Chinese for Mongghul terms. I have put the Chinese equivalents in parentheses after the Mongghul terms.

successful liquor workshop, madly pursues Ji Linghua until he finally rapes her in a meadow.

Three years later, Sunba returns from Shanxi Province and witnesses the heartbreaking scene of a wedding procession passing down West Street of Rainbow Town. Ji Linghua and Qi Xinglong have married.

In 1981, Sunba also runs the Bai Family liquor workshop known as Shambala (Xiangbala). It expands and enjoys good revenue at the expense of the Qi Family's liquor factory, which is finally driven out of business. Deeply resentful, Qi Xinglong secretly poisons the Shambala liquor that results in the death of some customers. Forced to pay heavy compensation, Shambala closes its doors and Sunba's family becomes impoverished.

To support the Bai Family, Gaduo, Sunba's first son, drops out of school at the age of thirteen. He endures extreme humiliation by working for Qi Xinglong wife's older brother (Ji Xiangmu, who had maliciously conspired to ruin Bai Family's business) at the Ji Family liquor factory.

Gaduo later marries his classmate, Lanmusuu (Lamusuo), Ji Xiangmu's daughter. Seven years pass. Gaduo earns enough to pay off his father's debt that he had incurred when he was forced to compensate customers poisoned by liquor from his factory.

Sunba proves successful in collecting highland barley in the countryside, transporting it to Weiyuan Town, and selling it to liquor-making enterprises. The Bai Family opens a new liquor factory and, three years later, it has achieved great success locally and on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau.

A daughter of the Bai Family, Jiransuu (Jiransuo), graduates from Shaanxi Normal University, returns home, finds a job in a Huzhu County travel agency, and is then pursued by Qi Duojie, a young wastrel and Qi Xinglong's son. During a Mongghul swing performance<sup>1</sup> for foreign tourists, Jiransuu suffers a head injury that requires

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<sup>1</sup> Swinging was historically a form of entertainment for certain groups of Tu. For images of modern versions of swinging, see <http://goo.gl/MNqG8d> (accessed 19 June 2016) and <http://goo.gl/W7xIQj> (accessed 19 June 2016).

surgery and an urgent blood transfusion. Qi Duojie is the only potential donor whose blood type matches hers. The ensuing transfusion saves Jiransuu's life, which brings the two young people closer together.

Later, Qi Duojie learns how his father hurt Jiransuu's family (the Bai Family); mistreated and abandoned his kind-hearted wife, Linghua; and then married Zhao Jinhua, a local Han woman (Qi Duojie's mother). Qi Duojie then gives up the idea of marrying Jiransuu, telling her that the only reason he "loved" her was to obtain the Qi Family's recipe for barley liquor.

Still another twist to this story is Jiransuu's "twin brother," Danzhuu (Danzhu), who grew up with Jiransuu and eventually became an important officer in the county's Traffic Bureau. Later the reader learns that Jiransuu is not his biological twin. Instead, she was given to Sunba and his wife (Dalan) in a hospital ward where Danzhuu and Jiransuu were born at the same time. The latter was born to a Han Chinese couple (Jiransuu's biological parents) from Huangzhong County who already had four daughters. Devastated at not having a son, they pleaded with Sunba and Dalan to adopt the daughter. Danzhuu's parents agreed and announced that Dalan had given birth to twins.

The story ends happily with Danzhuu and Jiransuu (Bai Family); Qi Duojie (Qi Family) and Lin Huasuo (Lin Family); and Ji Tianbao (Ji Family) and Qi Qianqiao (Qi Duojie's younger sister) having a group wedding on the sixth day of the sixth lunar month in 2015 in Jiransuu's newly opened Mongghul Folk Performance Garden. Family members and guests come together, drink, and enjoy themselves radiating an atmosphere of unity and harmony.

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The place names in this novel are real and about eighty percent of the characters' names are Mongghul, e.g., Danzhuu, Dalan, Lamu, Lanmusuu, Sunba, and Jiransuu. Featured Mongghul food includes

*halighii* (*halihai*),<sup>1</sup> *maha*,<sup>2</sup> and *pansan*.<sup>3</sup> Virtually every Mongghul man smoked in the past and the Mongghul tobacco bag and pipe are given detailed descriptions. Pipes and tobacco bags were considered "treasures." Men often smoked and enjoyed each other's pipe and tobacco once they gathered. For example, the author explains the tobacco bag and pipe belonging to Guanbu, who is Sunba's grandfather:

It is an old tobacco bag with an outside sewn from black cloth and a blue lining. Both the top and lower parts were each decorated with a piece of four *cun* red cloth sewn separately on the bag. A three *cun*<sup>4</sup> opening was made at the top of the bag in order to easily accommodate the pipe and to fill it with tobacco. Cloud patterns were embroidered in gold thread using a coiling technique on the red cloth on the bottom of the bag, where three *cun* long yellow tassels were attached. As time wore on, the yellow tassels slowly turned white. Sunba lightly took out a four to five *cun* long pipe and found the small bowl was made of brass. The mouthpiece was green jade and connected to the bowl by a silver stem more than eight *cun* in length. Grandfather's odor pervaded the dainty little bowl and old bag. The brass bowl was smooth and shiny after having been handled repeatedly by Grandfather while he was alive. The green jade mouthpiece appeared glossy and moist after Grandfather's day and night puffing. The black bag had many patches, testimony to Grandfather frequently having the bag on his person (98).

Sunba and Dalan's wedding showed traditional Mongghul wedding culture to the readers in detail. The wedding started with two men (bride-takers) dispatched from the groom's home to the bride's home. The next day, the bride, her companion, escorts, and bride-takers

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<sup>1</sup> Many thin pancakes are fried. Meanwhile, highland barley flour and tawny daylily powder are sprinkled into boiling water and stirred until a thick, well-cooked mixture is achieved. Pancakes are then rolled, and the mush is put inside with steaming, ground garlic. This is festival food and is also served when important guests visit (Limusishiden and Jugui 2010:123).

<sup>2</sup> Meat.

<sup>3</sup> Dough is twisted and then fried.

<sup>4</sup> One *cun* is equivalent to 3.3 cm.

reached the groom's home. During the wedding, the women from the bride's side sing "Receiving the Dried Unskinned Sheep Carcass," "What Did You Bring?" and "Opening the Bride's Door." The lyrics are given (in Chinese) in abbreviated form. In addition, the Log tuula Ritual (Luomutuoluo) is described.<sup>1</sup>

When the ritual of changing the bride's hair style to that of a married woman is complete, the Log tuula Ritual continues. Dalan sees a volume of scripture, a branch of cypress, a *sheng*<sup>2</sup> of grain, a bunch of wool, a bowl of milk, a black tea brick, a lamp, and a handful of chopsticks placed on the hall chest. A piece of white felt covers a table in the room. Rnqan's (Renqian) mother holds Dalan's arm and supports Dalan as she sits on the table, facing the outside. Lamu and Dalansuu hold Dalan's mother's arms as she sits on the table facing the inside. The mother and her daughter sit back to back on the table.<sup>3</sup> At this juncture, Dalan mother's eyes are wet with tears and Dalan's eyes are also moist.

The congratulatory speech at the wedding ceremony and the Opening the Bride's Mouth Ritual<sup>4</sup> are described in authentic detail. In addition, the author provides a detailed account of a Mongghul traditional funeral ritual via the death of Grandfather Guanbu. As Guanbu lies dying, a clear-water-filled bowl with a pair of chopsticks placed on it is put in front of Guanbu, signifying that a road has been made for his next incarnation. After he dies, his corpse is placed in a squatting position and adobe bricks are stacked around it forming a box. Next, villagers and clan members sit together and discuss funeral arrangements.

Once a sedan is made, the encoffining song is sung as a lamentation by the sons' wives and daughters. Unfortunately, the author mistakenly attributes the lamentation song to Guanbu's sons. Actually, it is sung by the wives and daughters of the sons of the

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<sup>1</sup> For more on this ritual, see (Limusishiden and Stuart 1998:49-50, 54, 71).

<sup>2</sup> A variable volume unit.

<sup>3</sup> The author mistakenly wrote Dalan's mother and her daughter sit face to face. Custom dictates that Dalan's mother and her daughter sit back to back on the table.

<sup>4</sup> After this ritual, the bride calls her mother-in-law "mother."

deceased. Nevertheless, songs related to encoffining, greeting lamas, receiving the deceased's (Guanbu's) daughters' lamentation songs, cremation lamentations, and the ritual of words spoken to the maternal uncle are reliably recorded, thus adorning the novel with genuine elements of Mongghul culture.

I also want to comment on the centrality of liquor in Mongghul culture:<sup>1</sup> "Highland barley is the root of evil and a demon incarnate," declares Dalan's mother (28), whose alcoholic husband often beat her when he was drunk. One night, Dalan and her mother are beaten again and then flee from their home and wander until eventually making their lives as servants for the Bai Family in Wei yuan Town. Years later after Dalan grows up and marries Sunba, a son of the Bai Family, she and her mother live permanently in the Bai Family home. Meanwhile, Dalan's father goes to mine gold in Yushu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture and is never heard from again.

I spent my childhood in a Mongghul village and can testify to the historical truth of alcoholic, drunk Mongghul men beating their wives. Wives had such fear of their alcoholic husbands that they often ran away from their homes and never returned.

After page 180, the story suddenly features scenes of modern lives, mainly depicted via various love affairs among characters of the four families. Other than the characters' ethnicity, there is no other claim to Mongghul. This is surely the reality for Mongghul who work or live in cities who have Han spouses. However, for Mongghul living in rural Huzhu, traditional Mongghul weddings continue, albeit in greatly simplified form.

There are some minor issues with medical information, e.g.: "According to the current situation, the electroencephalogram (EEG) shows there is still extravasated blood in your brain, which is the reason you are blind" (234). In fact, EEG is not used to diagnose intracranial hematoma rather, computed tomography (CT) or magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) is used in the case of head trauma.

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<sup>1</sup> For examples of liquor used at a Mongghul wedding in Huzhu in 1999, see <https://goo.gl/RBYUGN> and <https://goo.gl/h66Vka> (both accessed 25 June 2016).

The story is set in Weiyuan Town that historically belonged to the Haliqi area<sup>1</sup> consequently, Li more correctly could have written "Mongghul" not "Karilang" in the below:

Granny doesn't speak. Lanmusuu takes a pancake that had been already made by her mother-in-law from the kneading board and put it into in the oil in the cooking pot and said, 'Don't you know? Tying a tuft of sheep wool to the liquor pot is our Karilang [Keerlun] people's custom to show respect to guests - the sheep wool represents propitiousness (208).

I can only speculate why Li chose "Karilang." Perhaps she has found currency in supporting the contention that Mongghul origins are to be found in the Tuyuhun,<sup>2</sup> rather than the Mongols as evidenced by her two-volume work *Tuyuhun Kingdom*. However, most Mongghul in Huzhu believe Mongghul roots and Mongol roots are the same.

These criticisms are not meant, however, to detract from this young Mongghul author's very significant achievement in creating the first novel in Chinese that engages Mongghul social history and culture. This is a significant addition to her corpus of writing that includes *Leizuode xianrenzhang 'Tears Made Cactus'*, *Wodi jinghua 'Undercover Policewoman'*, and *Tuyuhun wangguo 'Tuyuhun Kingdom'*.

I hope the future will see Li Zhuoma make good use of her position with the Huzhu Literary Federation to visit more Mongghul elders, listen to their stories and histories and, with this information, continue to write distinctive Mongghul literature.

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<sup>1</sup> Historically Mongghul were divided into Haliqi and Fulaan Nara. The former includes today's Danma and Weiyuan towns, and Donggou, Dongshan, Wufeng, and Taizi townships. The latter includes today's Wushi Town, Hongyazigou and Songduo townships in Huzhu County; and Dala Township, Ledu Region, Haidong City. The people in Haliqi refer to themselves as Mongghul while Fulaan Nara residents call themselves Karilang.

<sup>2</sup> The Qinghai Tu Nationality Association met in August 2003 in Xining on the occasion of Lü Jianfu's publication - *Tu Nationality History*. It was then announced that the Association accepted Lü's research findings affirming Tu to be Xianbei/Tuyuhun descendants (Bao Yizhi 2006).

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## NON-ENGLISH TERMS

Bai 白  
 Bao Yizhi 鲍义志  
 Baojia 鲍家  
 cun 寸  
 Dala 达拉  
 Dalan 达兰  
 Dalansuu, Dalansuo 达兰索  
 Danma 丹麻  
 Danzhuu, Danzhu 旦主  
 Dasilu 大寺路  
 Donggou 东沟  
 Dongshan 东山  
 Fulaan Nara  
 Gaduo 尕多  
 Guanbu 官布  
 Guanting 官亭

Haidong 海东

Halazhigou 哈拉直沟

*halighii*, *halihai* 哈力海

Han 汉

*Heimudan*, *baimudan*, *hongmudan* 黑牡丹, 白牡丹, 红牡丹

Hongyazigou 红崖子沟

Huangzhong 湟中

Huzhu 互助

Ji 吉

Ji Linghua 吉玲花

Ji Tianbao 吉天宝

Ji Xiangmu 吉祥木

Karilang, Keerlun 克尔伦

Lamu 拉姆

Lanmusuu, Lanmusuo 兰姆索

Ledu 乐都

*Leizuode xianrenzhang* 泪做的仙人掌

Li Zhuoma 李卓玛

Limusishiden (Li Dechun 李得春)

Lin 林

Lin Huasuo 林花索

*log tuula*, *luomutuoluo* 罗木托罗

Lü Jianfu 吕建福

Lǚ Xia 吕霞

Lǚjia 吕家

*maha*, *rou* 肉

Ma Bufang 马步芳

*meigui jiayuan* 玫瑰家园

Minhe 民和

Hui 回

Mongghul, Tu 土

*pansan* 盘飧

Qi 祁

Qi Duo jie 祁多杰

Qi Jianqing 祁建青

Qi Qianqiao 祁茜巧

Qi Xinglong 祁兴隆

Qinghai 青海

*Qinghai renmin chubanshe* 青海人民出版社

Rnqan, Renqian 仁欠

Shambala, Xiangbala 香巴拉

Shanxi 山西 Province

Shaanxi 陕西

*sheng* 升

Shi Yanzhi 师延智

Shijia 师家

*Shuimogoulide zuihou yipan shuimo* 水磨沟里的最后一盘水磨

Songduo 松多

Sunba, Songba 松巴

Taizi 台子

Tuyuhun 吐谷浑

Tuyuhun wangguo 吐谷浑王国

*Walan qingke* 瓦蓝青稞

Weiyuan 威远

*Wode heliu* 我的河流

*Wodi jinghua* 卧底警花

Wushi 五十

*Wuyede niujiaohao* 呜咽的牛角号

Xianbei 鲜卑

Xining 西宁

Yatou 崖头

Yushu 玉树

*Yushu linfeng* 玉树临风

Zanghgua, Sangshige 桑士哥

Zhao Jinhua 赵金花

Zhongchuan 中川

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 REVIEW: *A CACTUS OF TEARS* AND *THE TUYUHUN KINGDOM*

Reviewed by Wu Jing 吴晶 (Shaanxi Normal University 陕西师范大学)



Li Zhuoma 李卓玛. 2010. *Leizuode xianrenzhang* 泪做的仙人掌 [*A Cactus of Tears*]. Xining 西宁: Qinghai renmin chubanshe 青海人民出版社 [Qinghai People's Press]. 205pp. ISBN 978-7-225-03650-2 (paperback 18RMB).



Li Zhuoma 李卓玛. 2015. *Tuyunhun Wangguo* 吐谷浑王国 [*The Tuyuhun Kingdom*]. Xining 西宁: Qinghai renmin chubanshe 青海人民出版社 [Qinghai People's Press]. 617pp. ISBN 978-7-225-04933-5 (paperback 88RMB).

Li Zhuoma lives in the relatively remote Sangshige Village, Wushi Town, Huzhu Monguor (Tu) Autonomous County in China's northwestern, sparsely populated Qinghai Province. She is one of the first Monguor women to publish her work in Chinese and receive growing recognition for her writings, which are generally well-knit, featuring a modern narrative style enriched by Monguor cultural elements.

"Xue hua de chong sheng 'A Snowflake's Resurrection'" published in *Zhongguo Tuzu 'China's Tu Nationality'* (2011) is a nostalgic contemplation on the brief existence of snowflakes and a persistent hope for restoration resulting from multiple frustrations and life failures.

Published in *Qinghai Hu 'Qinghai Lake'* in 2016, "Hua'er Hua'er 'Flower, Flower'" invokes a traditional, deeply-imbedded image

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Wu Jing. 2017. Review: *A Cactus of Tears* and *The Tuyuhun Kingdom*. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 45:122-131.

of females in Monguor folk culture. "Flower, Flower" depicts two generations of Monguor women, their struggle against convention and their pursuit of self-defined happiness. "Bleeding Loyalty," published in *Rainbow*,<sup>1</sup> a Huzhu County journal, recounts the legendary life of a policewoman as she battles social injustice to protect law and order.

Qinghai People's Press published *A Cactus of Tears* (2010), *Wodi jinghua 'Undercover Policewoman'* (2013), *Tuyuhun wangguo 'The Tuyuhun Kingdom'* (2015), and *Walan qingke 'Tile Blue Barley'* (2016). *The Tuyuhun Kingdom* is the first historical novel describing the migration of the Xianbei,<sup>2</sup> and the establishment of the first Tuyuhun<sup>3</sup> Kingdom in Qinghai and its historical vicissitudes.<sup>4</sup> This novel is sure to sit well with those who argue Monguor are Tuyuhun descendants, a contention disputed by those who claim that the Monguor are more directly related to the Mongols.<sup>5</sup>

*Tile Blue Barley* won Li an award and funding for "Eight Key Projects of Ethnic Minority Literature" from the China Writer's Association and "Key Works of Arts in Qinghai Province from 2015 to 2017." *Tile Blue Barley* portrays the lives of four Monguor women in four families in Rainbow, a fictional village situated in northwestern China. The four girls grow up together, struggle to survive the influence of family rivalries, have a chance at formal schooling, and ultimately take different paths in life, each with uncertain futures.

Li Zhuoma's literary works reveal her pursuit of ethnic identity, gender consciousness, and a balance between cultural clashes and accommodation. She is one of few modern Monguor women who walked out of mountain villages and obtained higher education in

<sup>1</sup> Reference to this publication is from Guo (2011).

<sup>2</sup> The Xianbei were the most important, largest federation of nomad tribes of the steppe region north of China during the Jin (265-420) and Northern Dynasties (386-581) periods (<http://tinyurl.com/jtfh8y4>, accessed 18 April 2016).

<sup>3</sup> "...a branch of the Xianbei tribe established a state based in the Qinghai region and extending east into present-day Gansu. Called Tuyuhun, this state lasted more than three centuries" (<https://goo.gl/o3LiQo>, accessed 27 November 2016).

<sup>4</sup> <http://tinyurl.com/zsqn48>, accessed 8 April 2016.

<sup>5</sup> For a summary of such arguments, see for example, Cui et al. (2015:18-22).

urban areas. A top student in her local high school, Li passed the National College Entrance Examination and subsequently enrolled in Xi'an University of Posts and Telecommunications as an engineering major. After graduation, she found a job as an engineer in a telecommunication company in Xi'an - a Cinderella story of an impoverished minority girl from a rural area gaining a foothold in the uptown world through her own efforts. Unexpectedly, she quit her job in 2008, left the envied city world, and returned to her home region to become a high school Chinese teacher and part-time writer.

Living in urban China gave her opportunity to broaden her worldview. She returned home because

I want to find a tranquil place. I can better understand where and what I'm rooted in. I also want to encourage and enlighten more Monguor children who are experiencing what I went through; to ignite their dreams and ideals with literature (Guo 2011:53).

Instilling her own schooling and life experiences into her literary works, she followed a path of self-realization, peaceful return, and is making efforts to revive Monguor culture through literary creation.

*A Cactus of Tears* is deliberately written without ethnic, cultural, or religious clues. This represents the first phase of Li Zhuoma's creation. *Cactus* is an imaginary tapestry of urban romance and a good piece of bold experimentation in writing based on her reading repertoire. When interviewed about this novel, she confided:

I am greatly inspired by what I read. Words have their own penetrating power. While reading, I tend to learn the creative and artistic ideas from writers so as to better absorb the essence of art and further try to surpass my predecessors. I have a fondness for the ancient poems of the Tang [618-907] and Song [960-1279] dynasties. I love the images and scenarios in these poems of which I prefer the soul-inspiring images and refined verses. I write with my heart, for I believe that only true affections can touch readers and obtain resonance (Guo2011:53).

This novel is a combination of the impact of her experience of reading classical literature, her keen observations on life, and tentative explorations of the human psyche. Symbolic images, serial structures, catchy songs, Tang and Song poetry, colloquial dialogue, tangled relationships, enticing plots, and passionate characters - these traditional elements of fiction combine, giving the novel the ambiance of a movie complete with backdrops of constantly changing colors and poetic voice-overs.

The title of this novel is symbolically analogous to the protagonist Cheng Siyu, whose personality and fate are doomed as the plant's qualities are determined by nature. On the novel's back cover we find:

An ancient legend says at the very beginning of Creation, the cactus was the softest creature in the entire universe, as delicate as water, and the mere touch of a hand could cause its demise. God sympathized and endowed it with armor equipped with a layer of steel-like thorns. Afterwards, the cactus's heart was hidden inside its harsh appearance and had melted into tears of loneliness, for no one could ever see its existence nor any longer feel its softness. Thus the cactus's motto became: Be hard and strong!

This passage explains the title. This definition is repeated by Xu Ning who tells Cheng Siyu (Li 2010:123):

Siyu, I know why you like to keep a pot of cacti - because you are a cactus. Under your thorny and hurtful shell lies a crystalline, fragile heart. Please let down your guard and let me hold your hand for I will protect you from all harm. I hope that one day you will no longer wear your thorny armor.

This heart-breaking romance is set in Dongdu, a fictional Plateau city. The plot unrolls around the twenty-seven-year-old, cactus-like Cheng Siyu, a beautiful, intelligent woman. Her childhood was first traumatized by a father who abandoned his family. Then when Siyu was in high school, her strong-willed mother committed

suicide, leaving her with one family member - a younger sister who suffers from a congenital heart disease. Doing various jobs, Siyu is able to support them both and eventually see her sister through college.

At the outset of the story, Siyu shuffles from the hospital where her sister is often treated and the Dongdu City TV station, where she is a part-time scriptwriter. By chance, she participates in a dating program and performs an improvised recitation of a modern romantic poem. This performance attracts three men - the famous law-column TV host, Xiao Kejing, who is in his thirties; the show's sponsor - a forty-one-year-old entrepreneur, who is the head of the Jiajiale Company, divorcee Shen Jie; and the sincere script editor, Xu Ning, who is in his twenties. She is subsequently courted by the three men of different personalities and backgrounds.

Beauty, love, lust, hatred, revenge, sacrifice, death, temptation, and responsibility - all are intertwined and revealed in a complex web of relationships as the story develops. When Siyu realizes her step-sister, Yi Huali, is her rival for Xu Ning, she accepts Xu's gifts and dates him to take revenge on her step-sister and her father's new family. To help pay her own sick sister's medical bills, she takes a full-time job in Shen Jie's company.

Touched by Xu Ning's honesty, she finds herself in love with him. She gets drunk in Shen Jie's apartment and hallucinates that Shen Jie is her boyfriend, Xu Ning. In this intoxicated condition, she declares her love to him. Shen Jie then takes advantage of this situation and has sex with her. She subsequently changes jobs to escape her suitors.

Under Xu's constant care and encouragement, she is finally willing to recognize her real feelings about Xu when she realizes that her younger sister, Cheng Sinong, whose university professor is Xu Ning's mother, is also madly infatuated with Xu. Sinong suffers a heart attack upon realizing that Siyu is with Xu Ning. Torn by guilt and love, Siyu makes yet another sacrifice by leaving her true love and marrying the third suitor, Xiao Kejing.

No happy endings for the lovebirds in this story! In order to save Sinong's life, Cheng Siyu kills herself so her heart can be given to

Sinong via a heart transplant. Before she ends her life, she writes five letters addressing her ex-boyfriend, Xu Ning; her husband, Xiao Kejing; her sister; her father; and Shen Jie. In the epilogue, after successful surgery, her sister vanishes. Xu Ning wanders near her grave, waiting for her heart to return. Xiao Kejing becomes more successful in his career, yet loses interest in love. Shen Jie continues struggling in the jungle of business.

Four chapters named after the seasons of the year each begin with a poem from the Tang or Song dynasties, suggesting plot development with climatic changes echoing emotional turbulence. The entire cycle of life is thus represented.

This novel is commendable in terms of its exquisite language, colorful emotions, and well-balanced structure. It reflects a mixture of original simplicity and sophisticated imagination; a timorous, girly experiment in depicting urban life and highlighting the traditional feminist stereotype with the typical qualities of self-sufficiency, self-restraint, and self-sacrifice. In a male-dominated society, the cactus-like protagonist remains the observed being, the object of male observers, and the target of female competitors. The author's intention in trumpeting love, goodness, and justice in a society prioritizing material wealth is highly visible.

The general, Chinese-reading audience that enjoys reading popular romances for entertainment will find this text a good diversion. In many ways reading it is like watching a sitcom. Compared to the roller coaster plot, characterizations lack strength and are not entirely convincing. More impressive are the dialogues between individual characters, especially in comparison to a lack of vividness in the portrayals of their inner worlds. This makes the tragic outcome less poignant. Each character holds on to their stubborn, narrow-minded approach to life, alternating between being the tantalizer and the tantalized. In the end, it is all farce leading to death and resurrection, with a touch of nihilism and the scorn of vanity.

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*The Tuyuhun Kingdom*

The two-volume, *Tuyuhun Kingdom* is a historical novel of a half million words. It is a chronological, fictional account of the Tuyuhun Kingdom starting from the story of the first king, Tuyuhun, and his westward migration from the Liaodong Plain early in the fourth century when he took a group of his followers to what is today known as Qinghai and established a "western nomadic empire, known by the name of its founder, Tuyuhun, [which] remained potent for centuries" (Holcombe 2001:131). The novel depicts several generations of wars and victories resulting in territorial expansion in northwest China, and ending with the heyday of the kingdom under the reign of Kualü (535-591; r. 540-591) (Dede 2010:122; Xiong 2009:280).

This novel is rich in creating national heroes and ethnic and cultural elements including religion and tribal customs. The language is beautiful and poetic, reflecting the author's solid foundation in the Chinese language and culture. Compared to her previous oeuvres, this novel provides a broad palette depicting geographical scenes and climate. There is much resemblance to a movie script with individual acts and different characters appearing in consecutive chapters and performing their roles. Different chapters tell stories of different generations, yet they reflect the repetitive essence of history, and cyclical patterns of life and human agency.

In general, characterizations lack depth and are unconvincing. Most heroes are similarly handsome and female characters are generally beauties. No specific portrait of personal traits is conceived. Despite varying social/tribal positions and gender, characters are uniformly informal, have a modern demeanor, and employ the same style of conversation. Verbal expressions are at odds with their identity and time, for example, feelings and emotions are extravagantly expressed through romantic dialogue. Such exaggerated, modern expression lacks the attraction that solemnity and "silence" brings to writing.

The historical narrative lacks vividness. Instead, it seems a reproduction of information from historical archives, serving as a

template for characters to carry out dramas of love and death. Furthermore, the plot is surprisingly similar to *Cactus*, with the author highlighting romance, female victims of sacrifice, and love triangles.

In the first chapter, for instance, the three tribal leaders fall in love with the same shepherdess and the plot unrolls as the girl is raped by one, captured by another for marriage, and then commits suicide for her true love, Tuyuhun.

Virginity is regarded as a woman's most sacred possession and the violence with which she is treated betokens male dominance over her as mere property. As the chapters come and go, triangular relationships repeat generation by generation. The leader cannot marry the one he loves, but must marry for the sake of his people's peace and prosperity. Similarly, the girl has no choice but to marry a leader she lacks romantic feelings for and, if it comes, she can only swallow the bitter jealousy and sadistic violence doled out by her husband.

While this sort of story-line emphasizes the importance of kingdom over personal affections, and the sacrifices young lovers make for the sake of the country, it also seems that the author prefers to describe romantic stories at the expense of the historical setting. Consequently, this novel is best categorized as a romance.

This audacious experiment in writing tackles a grand period of history and a multitude of historical figures that shuffle in and out. It gives free rein to the author's artistic imagination and innovatively describes and represents the Tuyuhun Kingdom and its migration to northwestern China.

General readers fond of traditional romances set in ancient times may find this book entertaining. Those interested in historical figures and records of the Tuyuhun will find ample material with each chapter introducing one generation of the kingdom until the most prosperous period of Tuyuhun development.

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#### NON-ENGLISH TERMS

Cheng Sinong 程丝浓

Cheng Siyu 程丝雨

Dongdu 东都

Gansu 甘肃

Huzhu 互助

Jiajiale 家家乐

Jin 晋 Dynasty

Kualü 夸吕

Li Zhuoma 李卓玛

Muliyán 慕利延

Qinghai hu 青海湖

Qinghai 青海

Sangshige 桑士哥

Shaanxi Normal University, Shaanxi shifan daxue 陕西师范大学

Shen Jie 沈杰

Shi Pi 视黑

Song 宋 Dynasty

Tang 唐 Dynasty

Tu 土

Tuyuhun 吐谷浑

Wushi 五十

Xianbei 鲜卑

Xiao Kejing 萧克敬

Xu Ning 徐宁

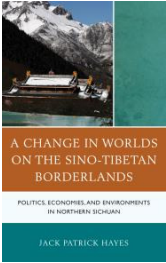
Ye Yan 叶延

Yi Huali 易华丽

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REVIEW: *A CHANGE IN WORLDS ON THE SINO-TIBETAN BORDERLANDS*

Reviewed by Bill Bleisch (China Exploration & Research Society)



Jack Patrick Hayes. 2014. *A Change in Worlds on the Sino-Tibetan Borderlands: Politics, Economies, and Environments in Northern Sichuan*. New York: Lexington Books. xlv + 251 pp, 5 maps, 1 table, bibliography in Chinese and in English, index. ISBN 978-0-7391-7380-0 (cloth: alk. paper 100USD) - ISBN 978-0-7391-7381-7 (electronic 99.99USD).

Modern descriptions of Tibetan border regions often construct a simple binary opposition between the Chinese state and Tibetan institutions. Those supporting Beijing's version of history usually sketch a description of the steady and ineluctable expansion of Chinese civilization and sovereignty. Others, critical of Chinese governmental policies in the region, use the same opposition to contrast the modern reality with a romantic vision of a past in which Tibetans lived in harmony with nature.

Jack Patrick Hayes has taken a closer look at the history of the Songpan region, and his analysis reveals something entirely different from either of these over-simplistic visions. Relying on provincial archives, local histories, journals written by both Chinese and foreign travelers, technical studies by geographers and scientists, and his own interviews with local state actors, Hayes undertakes "a kind of Geertzian thick description" (xviii) to "analyze the array of local, national, individual, and collective interests that shaped the struggle for control of the land and its resources" (xix).

The book details local history, traditions, and practices covering the greater Songpan region from the late imperial era until the close of the twentieth century, providing a sweeping historical

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Bleisch, Bill. 2017. Review: *A Change in Worlds on the Sino-Tibetan Borderlands*. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 45:132-144.

analysis of the interactions between local people and the state, between markets and governments, and between human beings and landscapes, during a time of intense social, political, and economic transformation. The reader can follow the transformation of Songpan from a pastoral region where the state had limited presence under the Qing (1644-1912), through the appearance of a new economic regime based on opium under the warlords, to the forced inscription of a new centralized socialist authority structure that replaced the previous pastoral and opium regimes with a state-controlled forestry regime, and finally into the modern era as the state attempted to deal simultaneously with local poverty and environmental degradation.

Throughout the book, Hayes strives to place the Songpan region in the "middle-ground," considering it not as a frontier on the edge of an unstoppable, expansionist Chinese state, but rather as an internal borderland, where the "friction" created by vast distances, high elevations, and complex topography resisted Chinese control and assimilation. Hayes places local economies, local ethnic identity, and the local landscape at the center of the analysis of how shifting social and political regimes transformed people and landscapes. He thus attempts to disaggregate Songpan from its political surroundings of Chinese Sichuan Province, and from its larger Tibetan cultural context, highlighting Songpan as a world of its own. This reveals a nuanced vision of multi-layered histories, cultures, and economies resulting from competing political, social, economic, and environmental forces:

It is an environmental history as much as it is a social and political one, one that examines the interaction of people and landscapes, conditioned by local natural environments, and the way the mutual interaction of social and political changes in turn altered the environment (xix).

Thus, focusing on the region as a Tibetan-dominated Sino-Tibetan borderland, Hayes tries to bring into relief the role of local Tibetans and other ethnic groups in shaping economic, political, and environmental landscapes. This sets the stage for a better understanding of the massive transformations of relationships among

people and between people and the environment that resulted from the state-building enterprise of the new socialist regime after 1949. Contradictions arise between the theories behind state policies and the practical realities of communities and landscapes. Radical transformation and contradictions continue after Mao's death in 1976, with the unfolding of economic reforms and new policies that emphasize environmental protection. In examining how the isolation of the region was finally overcome, ultimately by new infrastructure and new economic regimes, Hayes seeks to explain how a multi-ethnic and nearly stateless region came to be incorporated into modern China.

Hayes states the multiple purposes of the book in the introduction and also spells out the issues, contexts, and perceptions from which the study originated. He credits Melvyn Goldstein for debunking the notion of "Tibet" as a holistic entity by illuminating Tibetan diversity. He notes inspiration from Robert Marks, who first focused on the roles that local people played in environmental transformation in western China. He also draws on Dee Mack William's work on the interaction of Han and Mongol people with the Inner Mongolian landscape, and their perceptions and misrepresentations of each other. The influence of Richard White's concepts of borderlands and "middle ground" was clearly very important to the conception of the entire book. Geoffrey Samuel's characterization of many Tibetan populations in the Qing Dynasty period as "stateless societies," and James Scott's descriptions of the highlands of "Zomia" as upland regions where the "friction" of geography have inscribed variety on society are also acknowledged as influences.

Hayes extensively utilizes Joseph Echerick and Mary Rankin's idea of local elites and their "patterns of dominance," and also refers to Roberto Unger's "society-making." For the period after the establishment of New China, Hayes has based his approach loosely on Arun Agrawal's concept of "environmentality" and James Scott's ideas about local resistance to "high modernism." In examining historical environmental shifts, Hayes refers to the influence of Richard White's study of the northwest United States and Mark Elvin's sweeping

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overview of China. He also notes inspiration from the work of William Cronon and Toni Huber.

Chapter One, "People, Environments and Histories," provides a description of the background of the Songpan region up through the Qing Dynasty. Established in the Tang Dynasty (618-907) as a remote garrison post on the eastern border of the Tibetan Plateau, by the Qing Dynasty, the town of Songpan included a Chinese government administrative center and a Chinese military headquarters. It was ostensibly the political center of a vast region of complex geography generally higher than 3,000 meters above sea level. Throughout the imperial period, as is the case now, the majority of people in the region surrounding the town of Songpan were culturally Tibetan, as were their political and religious institutions, which maintained considerable autonomy from the Chinese center.

Rather than being a stable political entity with clear borders, Hayes considers the Songpan region as an ecological zone with fluid political boundaries. It was a changeable borderland with a diversity of ecosystems and cultures, where Han, Tibetan, Hui, and Qiang people lived and interacted with one another and with outsiders from many regions. In the 1890s, it was variously considered to be part of the rGyal Rong Tibetan states, the Hor States, or the Kham or Amdo Tibetan regions, and it was also claimed by the Qing governor-general of Sichuan. In the early 1950s it was partitioned between the Tibetan Sharkhog region, Kokonor, Amdo, Xikang, and Republican (Warlord) District 16. In the 1960s after the development of New China, it was included in the Southwest Region, the 124<sup>th</sup> Military Region, and Sichuan Province. Throughout, however, the region was characterized more by its environmental and ethnic diversity, and by its isolation.

Hayes concludes that it was never part of a unitary Tibet, or even a unitary Tibetan cultural regime, nor, despite claims by provincial officials, was it under the direct control of the Chinese state. Travel was slow, treacherous, and expensive, and the terrain, climate, and great distances limited the reach of the state and what it could do. Yet even as early as the Tang Dynasty, trade in tea, horses, and other goods connected the region to the lowlands beyond the mountains.

While the region was isolated politically, this trade connected Songpan with the outside world and exposed its minority cultures to outside influences. Hayes emphasizes that there were other minorities besides Tibetans and other religions besides Buddhism in Songpan, and that many Tibetans worked together with Han and other minorities for mutual benefit; Tibetan merchants were eager to trade with outsiders and Tibetan headmen were happy to have their authority bolstered by gaining the recognition of the Qing Dynasty as *tu-si*.

Consequently, Songpan was not all that isolated during the imperial era, nor were Songpan's wildernesses a refuge of pristine nature, untrammelled by the hand of man. Hayes demolishes the myth that Tibetans traditionally lived in gentle harmony with their environment and had little or no impact on the landscape. He compiles convincing evidence that Tibetan herding and use of fire to clear land had major impacts on the distribution of forests and grasslands in this region during the Qing period and after. Land clearance by fire, in particular, was so pervasive that the nearly universal pattern of deforested south-facing slopes was assumed to be a natural pattern by early explorers and later environmentalists, who did not realize that it was actually the result of deliberate human modification of the environment. The burned-over forests were not left barren, but were used for herding cattle, which could efficiently convert grass and forbs into meat, milk products, wool, and hides. Hence the agro-pastoral landscape that early explorers described was deliberately created by local people. This system lasted through the end of the Republican era (1912-1949) and into the beginning of New China. Despite a long continuity of natural resource management systems, however, social and political management of the region began to shift in the Republican era.

Chapter Two, "Pastoral Pursuits, Mining and Poppies: Resources, Authority, and Resistance under Local and Warlord Regimes," details the changes that occurred after the fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1911, particularly with regard to the transition from a pastoral economy during the Republican era. Chinese forestry and mining concerns first extended their interest into the region in the

1910s and 1920s. This was followed by even more profound change in the 1930s and 1940s, as new economic forces created what Hayes calls an "opium regime" in Songpan. Cultivation of crops had always been centered in the more accessible river valleys, which also provided farmers with ready access to markets. Unfortunately for those living in these more accessible areas, economic access also meant political access, which in turn meant vulnerability to coercive taxation by local elites and warlords.

Hayes proposes that the rapid adoption of poppies as the crop of choice was a response to ballooning taxation during the warlord period and a tax structure that stifled other entrepreneurial pursuits. With the new crop came a new reality of criminal networks, oppressive taxation, and environmental degradation. Yet despite these shifts, local elites, many of them Tibetan, continued to dominate the landscape. In fact, Hayes suggests, they enabled the development of the opium regime, which was controlled by local Tibetan, Han, and Hui elites in collusion with regional criminal groups. As violent and oppressive as the opium regime was, it was poppy cultivation that became the primary force in regional development and integration after the fall of the Qing. The Nationalist state attempted some reforms and development, but only managed to overlay a new administrative structure on top of the pre-existing power structures of local elites. The state under the Guomindang did gain some limited control of opium production and revenue, but in the main, central authority was conspicuous in its absence: "The functional reach of the state into local governance would have to wait until the rise of a new, more powerful, and more determined socialist state in the 1950s" (76).

Chapter Three, "Inscribing the State on the Landscape: State Models for Tibetans, Herds and Forests in Songpan," covers the turbulent history and rapid changes after 1949, culminating with the first reforms in the 1980s following Chairman Mao's death. Following the victory of the Communists, Songpan was among the first Tibetan regions to be fully occupied by the new socialist state, and the new regime that followed immediately targeted local Han and Hui communities in Songpan for radical social reform. However, Hayes

points out that the same regime expediently left Tibetan elites in place and at first treated them very gently. Hayes interprets this gradualist approach to the numerically superior Tibetan population to have been a strategic decision.

At the same time, the new socialist state undertook massive development of new infrastructure, particularly roads, as well as organizing a major transfer of non-Tibetan people into Songpan. This effectively overcame the geographical and political isolation of the region and set the stage for future change. Quite suddenly then, beginning in 1957, the state entered into every level of Tibetan society, with the destruction of remaining poppy agriculture and the targeting of Tibetan elites for social reform. Collectivization was extended to Tibetans at all levels of society in 1958. The traditional opium, agricultural, and pastoral regimes were all overturned. This transformation was so radical that some local informants called it a "shift in the universe" (*Jig rTen* [sic] according to the author, which may be a mistranscription of '*Jig rTen*'). Hayes interprets the desperate but completely unsuccessful Songpan Tibetan revolts in 1956-1957 and then again from 1958 to 1962 as highlighting:

the state's hubristic belief that with either a gradualist or a decisive stroke the state could easily persuade local Tibetans to abandon their local autonomy, traditional practices, and control over many local natural resources. In the end, the state had to impose its will... (127).

Tibetans at this time also lost access to the forest and pasture resources of the remote slopes, as control was given to the state forestry bureaucracy. Exploitation of natural resources; trees, grass, and minerals; had previously formed the economic basis of local society. Traditionally, forests were for the most part treated as a common resource. The development of a state-led forestry sector in Songpan was based on massive changes in land and forest tenure, thus disconnecting Tibetans from the forests and the fire-maintained pastures that they had previously exploited. Hayes points out that even as late as 2005, only seventeen percent of the land in the Songpan

region was under any kind of direct agricultural cultivation (204). Logging crews, mainly Han Chinese from outside the region, quickly felled much of the accessible forests during rampant exploitation in the 1960s and 1970s, clear-cutting not only on state land but much local collective forest as well, all justified in the name of nation-building. After 1959:

... state governmentalization of the forest resources in the region added a new element to the story of state-local relations and environmental change - one focused not just on local control, but rather on the extractive power of state and industrial forces (127).

The post-Mao era was marked by market reforms and major changes in land tenure arrangements, including eventually official decollectivization in Songpan in 1981-1982. In forested areas, local people were once again given responsibility for some of the collective forests under a system of responsibility contracts. In Songpan, as elsewhere, the experiment back-fired. Disconnected from older traditions of forest resource management, and with little trust in the future of their usufruct, locals quickly cleared much of the remaining forest on their village lands in 1980-1982, even as state forest farms accelerated their cutting. This continued the process of environmental degradation in what has become known as the "Third Great Cutting."

Chapter Four, "Landscapes and Civilization: Tourism, Ecology, and Ethnicity in Modern Songpan," covers the 1980s and 1990s, when the Soviet-style planned economy was replaced with a market-oriented economy, and the government adopted radically new approaches towards the environment and ethnicity. During this period, logging by state forest farms at first continued at the same pace, and then accelerated. Nevertheless, despite the revenues from logging, Songpan remained a "poverty-stricken area." Hayes raises, but does not try to answer, the question of why the substantial revenues from the state forestry regime did not improve the local standard of living. Then, following disastrous floods on the lower Yangtze in 1997-1998, a

blanket logging ban and the strict closure of timber markets led to the near-complete collapse of the state forestry sector.

The local administration for forest production was suddenly transformed into an administration for forest protection, and large areas of collective lands were co-opted into nature reserves and other protected areas. All of this had profound impacts on local livelihoods and Songpan's economy. Meanwhile, continuing efforts to *tigao suzhi* 'raise the quality' of *suzhidi* 'low-quality' areas and the implementation of new state-led poverty alleviation programs meant that the Reform Period led to more, not less, involvement of the state at the local level.

Poverty alleviation programs and the new environmental protection policies were combined in what Hayes calls a new "eco-ethno-tourism" economic regime. Hayes points out that contradictions were inevitably built into these new policies. On the one hand, economic development programs struggled to further reduce the isolation of the region and put local means of production onto a "scientific basis." Simultaneously, however, environmental protection and eco-ethno-tourism programs promoted and marketed pristine nature and unspoiled culture:

Tourism wants conservation of tradition; poverty alleviation wants modernization of tradition; market capitalism needs development of natural resources; environmental protectionism demands conservation... (174).

In his conclusion, Hayes provides a valuable summary and some well-considered discussion of the relevance of this specific study to understanding of Chinese history in general. He concludes that the transformation of Songpan was never a clear-cut case of the steady, ineluctable expansion of Chinese sovereignty westward. The Chinese state did not:

...wash over the region like a wave, swallowing each community, eroding local practices and laying down a sediment of Chinese political, economic, and social culture....Rather, the Songpan region demonstrates that

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centralized expansion and state-making were not smooth matters, but slow and halting projects that included state and local actors and that are still ongoing (202).

Throughout recent history, the Chinese state interacted with the people of the Songpan region, not through large-scale wars and major battles, or even through high-level political campaigns during the Maoist era. Instead, it was through exploitation of local markets and natural resources, which created mixed markets dominated by local elites. Through these markets, local Tibetan elites were brought into contact with varied peoples and different parts of China. Despite periods of coercion and resistance over the centuries, most interactions throughout much of this period involved mutually beneficial trade. While there were unquestionably episodes of oppression of Songpan's Tibetans, as well as other minorities, Hayes concludes that local Tibetan elites survived most of the changes as a viable force, even after the Cultural Revolution, when they once again came to dominate certain sectors of the economy "by channelling national and regional political and socio-economic decisions at the local and prefectural level" (202).

Hayes also puts into better focus the complex interactions of local people and the state with the natural environment. He elucidates how the people of Songpan perceived and interacted with the environment, not by examining what they said or wrote in policy statements, but by asking what people actually did:

The Songpan region is a complex ecosystem shared by Tibetans, Han, and Hui, as well as by competing local, regional, and national administrations. It is a "middle ground" where the political and economic interests of the state, ethnic officialdom, and the environment meet and are accommodated - or at least negotiated (203).

Through this process of analysis, Hayes concludes that there is no evidence to support many commonly held beliefs about the history of the environment in these regions. One such imagined belief is a

universally preservationist approach to the environment among traditional Tibetans. Destruction of forests by burning to create more grazing land was widespread in Songpan and had large impacts long before the Chinese state came to control forest use and protection, even if the deliberate nature of these modifications of the landscape rarely entered outsiders' perceptions. Nor were Tibetans the only source of pressure for environmental stewardship. While state-led forestry was a key driver of environmental degradation in the 1960s and 1970s, local people were primarily responsible for the "Third Great Cutting" in the 1980s. Forest conservation is now a key issue in China as a whole and specifically in the upland regions of the borderlands.

"The idea that the perceptions and practices of a Chinese state are "bad" for the environment and Tibetan Buddhist (or Bon) perceptions and practices are "good" is simply not accurate" (205). It is true that new market forces that drive local decision-making about natural resources have been introduced from China, but these forces are not inherently Chinese. They are part of the mix of capital flows, new technology, and new ideas about economic "development" that are spreading into remote areas throughout Asia. "There is nothing intrinsically Chinese or Tibetan about changes in the landscape" (207)

Hayes's thick description and rich analysis should do much to shake popular notions about Tibetan borderlands like Songpan. In this impressive effort of scholarship, Hayes simultaneously achieves an ample depth of detail and a sweeping scope of interpretations. This reader, however, found the book to be frustrating reading at times. Some merciless editing could have improved the writing, which is often unnecessarily repetitive. A simple time-line or table of key events would have been very helpful for this naïve reader. The maps are poorly reproduced and all but indecipherable. At times, the logical flow appears to have burst its banks, as one topic floods into another topic with which it has no obvious relationship.

Hayes also occasionally appears to fall victim to over-simplistic views very much like those that he decries. For example, he states categorially that:

... the practice of forestry and even the setting aside of land in nature reserves are not based so much on sustainable principles or a view to long-term investments, but on the desire to maintain control of the region and its peoples (205).

While there were surely state actors who did see their mandate in this way, a more nuanced analysis would have also considered the varied perceptions and agendas of the many players in the "modernist" environmental regime, including the conservation bureaucracy created by national law and obligations under international conventions overseen by multinational bodies like UNESCO, and the staff of local and international NGOs, many of whom had considerable stake in promoting more participatory approaches to resource management.

In another instance of an apparent lacuna, Hayes proposes that isolation in the Songpan region was not voluntary or the result of individual agency, but then draws extensive parallels with "Zomia," the term used by James Scott for the isolated uplands of southwest China and Southeast Asia. Scott's more recent work suggests that the isolation of the inhabitants of Zomia, rather than being an aboriginal condition, was often a very deliberate choice made by those fleeing to the uplands to escape the oppression of lowland states whose main interactions with their subjects involved inflicting taxes, forced military service, *corvée* labor, and at times slavery upon them (Scott 2009). Hayes shows that at various times Chinese states did their best to extract one or another of these services from their citizens in Songpan, not always successfully. One is left to wonder if at least some of the inhabitants of the remoter areas of the Songpan region chose their isolation in an astute practice of the art of not being governed. This is a subject that Hayes never explores.

Despite these few shortcomings, the book is an excellent reference for anyone interested in the modern history of the Tibetan borderlands. It is also an important and refreshingly original addition to the case studies of the uplands of Asia and how their peoples and

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landscapes have reacted and adapted to change when confronted head on with modernization and the modern state.

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 REVIEW: *TIBETAN LITERARY GENRES, TEXTS, AND TEXT TYPES*

Reviewed by Tricia Kehoe (University of Nottingham)



Jim Rheingans (ed). 2015. *Tibetan Literary Genres, Texts, and Text Types: From Genre Classification to Transformation*. Leiden: Brill. Xi + 293. Preface, list of contributors, index. ISBN 978-90-04-30099-6. Hardcopy 109EURO.

Intended as a follow-up to Cabezón and Jackson's groundbreaking *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre* (1996), *Tibetan Literary Genres, Texts, and Text Types: From Genre Classification to Transformation* aims to deepen our understandings of Tibetan literature by approaching Tibetan text types from systematic and historical perspectives. Growing out of a conference panel at the twelfth Tibetan Studies seminar, the book explores both pre-modern and contemporary genres, as well as issues of classification and methodologies. In doing so, this collection of essays edited by Jim Rheingans covers a great deal of new ground in terms of discussions of terminology, definitions, and the theoretical landscape pertaining to literature, genre, text boundaries, and typologies in the field of Tibetan literature.

Neatly organized by way of a short preface, list of contributors, introduction, ten essays, and an index, the book is divided into four parts, each dealing with a clearly defined area of inquiry. Over the course of 293 pages, it moves swiftly from the general to the specific across a variety of texts that include songs and poetry, offering-ritual, hagiography, lexicographical texts, and modern literature, in an accessible and structured manner.

The book begins with an introductory essay from Jim Rheingans that unpacks key conceptual and terminological underpinnings informing the contributions that follow. He describes

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Kehoe, Tricia. 2017. Review: *Tibetan Literary Genres, Texts, and Text Types*. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 45:145-149.

the various forms of classifications that have figured across Tibetan literary scenes, both pre-modern and contemporary, and provides a pithy literature review of relevant scholarship and academic approaches to Tibetan literature. He notes that while there is a growing number of publications on modern Tibetan literature, the issue of systematizing Tibetan literary genre remains relatively neglected. Throughout this introduction, Rheingans makes a compelling argument for a more thorough and consistent research of Tibetan literary genres, noting that it would work towards offering a broader and more comprehensive picture of Tibet's literary heritage.

Part One, "Classifying Tibetan Texts and Topoi," deals with genre typologies and reflects on overall issues and challenges of classifying Tibetan texts. It begins with a paper by Ulrike Roesler that presents a helpful survey of some traditional and contemporary ways of categorizing Tibetan literature. Describing classification systems found in early Tibetan catalogues as well as a number of other sources, Roesler finds traditional Tibetan scholarship to have been deeply influenced by Indian concepts and to have a clear focus on monastic learning and literature. She concludes by arguing that finding an appropriate vocabulary and theoretical framework will be an important step in enabling us to speak about Tibetan texts as literature, and to appreciate Tibetan works as art forms in their own right.

In the next paper, Ekaterina Sobkovyak offers an analysis of a genre of Tibetan literature known as *ming gi rnam grangs* 'enumeration of terms'. Focusing on the use of quotation in a text from the eminent Buddhist scholar-encyclopedist, Klong rdol bla ma (1719-1795), Sobkovyak brings to light the transmission of several classifications of the '*rig gnas*' fields of knowledge, and in doing so, argues compellingly for the importance of "establishing correspondence between quotation and original passage" (54).

In the final paper of Part One, Giacomella Orofina offers a fascinating discussion of the role of the trickster in Tibetan folk literature. She offers two different Tibetan trickster accounts and comments on their similarities with Greek and Egyptian stories. While Orofino argues that uncovering the historical foundation of the

trickster story may prove impossible, the presence of the trickster in Tibetan folk literature serves to highlight the circularity, transculturality, and fluidity that oral lores enjoyed in early Eurasian civilizations.

Part Two, "Fluid Genres and Their Reception," moves on to questions of blurred genre boundaries and examines to what extent specific genres should be classified, as well as how particular genres have historically developed. In his paper, Roger R Jackson offers a provocative discussion on what he sees as an openness and fluidity in ritual texts and perhaps Tibetan literature more broadly. He queries whether "bright lines" can ever be drawn between texts types and to what extent attempts to do so may be somewhat misguided. Taking a dGe lugs pa ritual as an example, Jackson argues that texts are often less bounded and more fluid than their location under any single title might suggest, and cautions against seeing Tibetan literature as a static and fixed entity.

In the second essay of Part Two, Ruth Gamble considers two distinct histories of the Tibetan *mgur* 'songs' genre. Tracing approaches to *mgur* in the works of Döndrup Gyal (1953-1985) and Chögyam Trungpa (1940-1987), two writers working in very different cultural and social milieus, Gamble contends that it is important to take note of the various ways literary and social criteria are both affected and shaped by interpretations and expectations of discursive communities.

Part Three, "Studies of Specific Texts and Genres," moves into more specific territory to test theses and assumptions against concrete realities. To begin this section, Franz-Karl Ehrhard's essay presents and analyses a Padmasambhava biography from the Sa skya pa School. This seventeenth century text, argues Ehrhard, illustrates a blending of the two literary genres of biography and prayer to the Precious Guru. He asserts that this particular genre mixing can be accounted for by considering the local political and cultural uncertainties of the time when gTsang kings were attempting to drive away Mongol forces and build a strong sense of Tibetan nationalism rooted in the Yarlung period. In doing so he reiterates the importance of historicizing texts

and paying close attention to the social and cultural milieu from which they hail.

The next paper in this section, written by Peter Verhagen, focuses on the "tools of the trade" used by Tibetan translators during the sNga dar and Phyi dar periods. Focusing on the lexicographical sources available to translators in Tibet, Verhagen asserts that the practice of translation in pre-modern Tibet holds promise for illuminating the various interpretative and creative processes involved in the trans-cultural enterprise of Indo-Tibetan translations.

In the final paper of this section, Victoria Sujata offers a detailed analysis of the poetic techniques in a selection of highly expressive *mgur* 'songs' from Pha bong kha pa bDe chen snying po (1878-1941). Presenting translations of four of his autobiographical songs and tracing the development of the overall shape of a *mgur*, Sujata argues that structure and meaning can be mutually reinforcing and used together to articulate a clear message.

The final section of the book, "Tradition and Modernity: Tibetan Literature in Transition," examines the question of change and continuity for genre in modern Tibetan literature. The section begins with a provocative paper from Lama Jabb who criticizes what he sees to be a very common tendency in scholarship on modern Tibetan literature to take the 1980s as the birth point of a new literary revolution. Shedding clear light on the many levels of interplay between the orality of Tibetan culture and modern literary creativity, Jabb argues against seeing the 1980s as a rupture with traditional forms of literature, and calls for greater appreciation of the enduring artistic legacies of Tibet's rich oral and literary traditions.

In the final essay of both Part Four and the book, Peter Schwieger identifies and describes what he argues to be a genre in transition. Briefly describing the tradition of Tibetan hagiographies, Schwieger swiftly moves on to a translation of a Tibetan short story dealing with ideals of hagiographies. Nowadays, claims Schwieger, Tibetan authors writing under Chinese rule are wont to contrast old and new social ideals of Tibetan life, often questioning ideals conveyed by classical Tibetan hagiographies.

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Overall this well-organized book succeeds in deepening our knowledge of Tibetan literature, offering an excellent contribution to the relatively neglected area of Tibetan textual studies. Covering a great deal of new ground and posing many crucial questions that will pave the way for further research, *Tibetan Literary Genres, Texts, and Text Types: From Genre Classification to Transformation* brings into clear view some of the core ideas and debates in the study of Tibetan textual genres and opens the doors for a greater appreciation of Tibetan literature in all its richness and complexity. A highly accessible and engaging read, the book is well worth a visit for anyone interested in Tibetan literature, while those more familiar with the field will also find much to take away.

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REVIEW: *LANGUAGE VARIATION AND CHANGE IN AN AMDO TIBETAN VILLAGE: GENDER, EDUCATION AND RESISTANCE*

Reviewed by Zoe Tribur (University of Oregon)



Jermay J. Reynolds. 2012. *Language Variation and Change in an Amdo Tibetan Village: Gender, Education and Resistance*. PhD dissertation, Georgetown University, ix+187p, <https://goo.gl/5dBbDA>, accessed 11 June 2016.

Following the quantitative tradition of sociolinguistic research pioneered by such scholars as William Labov, Walt Wolfram, and Penelope Eckert, Reynolds presents a detailed, coherent analysis of the social parameters behind a specific on-going sound change, the merger of syllable final bilabial nasal (m) with alveolar coronal nasal (n), in one small farming community in Qinghai Province. His is certainly not the first such study on Tibetan sound change. It is also not the first study to investigate the merger of (m) into (n), which is a prominent feature of so-called "farmer" dialects of Amdo Tibetan (Hua 2005).

The results of Reynolds' study suggest that the distribution of the merged [n] and non-merged [m] variants of the variable (m) is associated with speaker age and also with language ideology, as the innovative variant [n] is more frequent in the speech of young speakers, who seem to be leading the on-going change. It appears less in speakers who report a positive identification with Tibetan language.

The sound change that is the focus of Reynolds' paper and Spearhead,<sup>1</sup> the community where it is occurring, exist within a larger sociolinguistic context of two traditionally identified sociolects in Amdo Tibetan, "farmer" dialects and "nomad" dialects. While the two lects are identified by the traditional subsistence means and lifestyles

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Tribur, Zoe. 2017. Review: *Language Variation and Change in an Amdo Tibetan Village: Gender, Education and Resistance*. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 45:150-158.

<sup>1</sup> "Spearhead" is a pseudonym (44).

of their speakers, there are clear structural types that serve to broadly differentiate one speech variety from the other (Hua 2002; Padma Lhun'grub 2009). These broad structural differences have emerged primarily as a result of divergent patterns of language change, namely a conservative tendency shared across dialects spoken by traditional semi-migratory pastoralists, and an innovative tendency shared across those spoken by traditional sedentary agriculturalists (Green 2012). While all Amdo Tibetan dialects have undergone sound changes since the period during which Written Tibetan was created and standardized (ca. 650-850 CE), farmer dialects in particular seem to have gone through more changes compared with nomad dialects, particularly sound mergers which, resulting as they do in a reduction of the phonemic inventory, represent structural simplification. Language varieties with higher rates of change (i.e., innovative varieties) also tend to undergo a higher rate of simplifying changes (Dahl 2004).

Thus, hypothetically, farmer dialects are not only more prone to change but, in terms of overall structural complexity, they should be "simpler"<sup>1</sup> on some level than nomad dialects. At the level and scale of broad, long-term historical trends, structural complexity of language varieties seems to be correlated with two distinct, yet interconnected social conditions: social network size/density (Milroy 2004), and relative number of adult language learners (McWhorter 2007). At the level of synchronic variation or short-term change (within one or two generations), the distribution of innovative as opposed to conservative structures is correlated to social-demographic factors such as gender, age, education level (Labov 1966; Trudgill 1972; Eckert 2000) and, of

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<sup>1</sup> The notion of relative complexity is a contentious issue in linguistics. This is true even for linguistic structural domains that seem to obviously lend themselves to easy quantification, such as phonetics-phonology. For example, in terms of both segment inventory and syllable structure, Mandarin Chinese would seem to be a "simpler" phonology than English. However, once tones are added to the picture (as any Chinese speaker of even the most basic competency knows they must), the total inventory of phonemically contrastive syllables is considerably larger and more complex. McWhorter, Dahl, and others have proposed a rough rule of thumb, so to speak, for determining relative complexity: ease of acquisition for adult learners.

course, the linguistic background of speakers. Reynolds concentrates on one farmer dialect, focusing on the sociolinguistic parameters that condition the kind of variation that occurs within a shorter timeframe, at the scale of individual speakers' lifetimes. His research provides valuable insight into the individual behaviors and social conditions that drive large-scale, typological shifts in language structure that, for example, led to the development of distinct sociolects of Amdo Tibetan associated with farming vs. nomadic communities.

For scholars working in any field, how to identify and talk about the languages spoken in Tibetan areas, sometimes by non-Tibetans, is by no means a trivial dilemma. Genetically speaking, Tibetan - spoken across a large, contiguous geographic area by communities of speakers that can be isolated from one another but nonetheless maintain consistent economic, cultural, and kinship ties - is sometimes described as a dialect continuum (e.g., Chirkova 2007:412). Varieties such as Amdo Tibetan are considered dialect groups that consist of smaller individual dialects, such as the Spearhead dialect. These, in turn are related to one another and differ from one another to varying degrees. On the other hand, certain of these dialect groups, including Amdo Tibetan, possess "language-like" features. For example, the dialects within Amdo Tibetan share most or all of their verbal morphology with each other, including many morphemes not shared by Tibetan varieties belonging to other dialect groups. In other words, Amdo Tibetan has features associated with being a distinct language.

The picture of Tibetan internal diversity is somewhat clarified by the adoption of the label "Tibetic" and the phylogenetic terminology that goes with it. Consequently, Tibetic, envisioned as a purely linguistic science device, is a separate clade, or branch, within the Trans-Himalayan (formerly Sino-Tibetan via Tibeto-Burman) language family. Tibetic languages are the next level of classification with "language" here referring to a genetic unit, as opposed to a social or political unit. Under Tibetic languages fall the next level of genetic classification: dialects. Based on this system, Amdo Tibetan is a Tibetic language and Spearhead is an Amdo Tibetan dialect.

From a linguist's perspective, the above system allows for a coherent and orderly description of language variety and variation by breaking diversity down into hierarchical levels of dialect, language, branch, family, and so-on, based on the yardstick of presumed genetic relationships as opposed to geographic or typological criteria. Furthermore, it neatly side-steps the problem of mutual intelligibility, which is at best an unreliable indicator of linguistic difference. In the case of Tibetan, whose six million plus speakers encompass a wide range of linguistic registers, literacy, and multilingualism but who tend to share a strong, unitary ethnolinguistic identity, mutual intelligibility is practically useless. Reynolds points out that whether or not a native Tibetan speaker finds a particular Tibetan variety intelligible depends as much on the speakers' background, including literacy level, as on the actual degree of structural dissimilarity between varieties (6-7). Aside from generally aiding communication about Tibetan diversity, the name "Tibetic" itself would seem to have the added benefit of removing the discussion of language a step away from ethnicity and culture.

As Chirkova (2007) notes, notions of culture and ethnic identity are directly and implicitly connected to language. One consequence of this is that discussions of linguistic diversity within China are frequently influenced by non-linguistic concerns.<sup>1</sup> Tibetic, therefore, would seem to be a term that has only linguistic significance. Thus, we can speak of Tibetans as speakers of Tibetic languages, such as Amdo Tibetan, and non-Tibetic languages, such as Namuyi, genetically classified as Qiangic (Bradley 1975; Lakhi et al. 2007). We can also speak of Tibetic languages spoken by non-Tibetans, such as Dzongkha, spoken in Bhutan. These nuances are often lost in translation in the adherence to traditional descriptors of Tibetan and related speech varieties.

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<sup>1</sup> By way of example, Chirkova (2007:409-410) mentions the drawn out debates about whether Baima, a speech variety of the Qiangic branch of Trans-Himalayan (formerly Sino-Tibetan) spoken in Sichuan Province, should be labeled a language or a Tibetan dialect.

There are good reasons to reject the above system. While it makes it easier to communicate with linguists and other academics who are unfamiliar with Tibetan, those who are familiar may find the use of new terms and labels needlessly obfuscating. More seriously, there is concern that the adoption of terminology differentiating levels of linguistic genetic diversity, originally intended to sidestep ethnicity and culture, risks generating confusion and misunderstanding around these very issues, or even, in some speakers' eyes, outright harming communities. Language is independent of, yet interconnected with all other aspects of human social life, as sociolinguistic studies such as the one under review, make abundantly clear. Because it concerns linguistic and non-linguistic aspects, we can expect that the discussion of Tibetan's genetic classification will continue to be debated into the future. We cannot, therefore, afford to discount the diverse and evolving perspectives of community members.

At 187 pages, *Language Variation* consists of seven concise chapters and a bibliography. In addition to providing background information on Amdo Tibetan - where it is spoken and who speaks it - Chapter One situates the research topic in the larger contexts of sociolinguistics and linguistic research on Tibetan. Regarding Amdo Tibetan's genetic affiliation and phylogenetic status, Reynolds follows the classification of Hua (1991), Zhang (1993), Bradley (1997), and Padma Lhun'grub (2009), who divide modern Tibetan into five major dialects. According to this system, Amdo Tibetan is a Northwestern dialect. While he does not mention the existence of other classificatory systems, most notably Tournadre's (2008:2014) advancement of the Tibetic genetic grouping, Reynolds does address the issue of internal diversity within Tibetan, including touching on the additional complications that result from the existence of different registers of Written Tibetan.

Chapter Two presents an overview of the theoretical approaches implemented for this study. Beginning with a summary of Labov's work and the field of research it inspired, Reynolds also discusses more typologically-concerned sociolinguistic research exemplified by scholars such as Trudgill and McWhorter. Chapter

Three focuses on the sociolinguistic and cultural conditions of Spearhead and includes a discussion on developing language ideologies around Tibetan and Chinese that affect the area.

Chapter Four details the research methods and statistical analysis the author employed for this study. Data was collected from sixty speakers of Spearhead Amdo Tibetan, fifty-two of whom were born in Spearhead. The rest were born elsewhere. All are native speakers of Amdo Tibetan. Twenty-five participants are reported as being literate in Written Tibetan (with a wide range of proficiency levels represented). The remainder are illiterate. The usefulness of Written Tibetan literacy as a variable (relative to other social variables of sex, etc.) in this particular study was partially hampered by the fact that all female participants over forty were illiterate. Study participants were further divided into categories according to age, sex, occupation, and education level (in addition to Tibetan literacy). Literacy in Chinese was not examined separately from education level as a parameter. Audio-recorded sociological interviews were conducted with participants. This also provided data for auditory analysis. Reynolds' analysis included a total of 3,052 tokens of the variable syllable-final (m), averaging forty tokens per speaker. In addition to analyzing the distribution of [n] and [m] variants of this variable relative to social parameters, Reynolds also took care to analyze the phonological, prosodic, and lexical environments in which variants occurred.

Chapter Five presents and analyzes the results of the study, giving an overview of identifiable production patterns. All speakers produced some tokens of the merged variant [n] (90). Not surprisingly, linguistic constraints, specifically the height of the preceding vowel, are the strongest predictor of whether a speaker used a merged or non-merged variant. Of the social factors, age was the most strongly correlated individual factor. Merging was highest, approaching seventy percent in the twenty-thirty age group (97). However, literacy, age, and sex were all found to be highly interactive. Thus, illiterate female speakers as a group had the highest rate of merging (99), while among the male participants, age was a more important factor (100).

Among young speakers (thirty or under), literacy, and not age, was the most important factor (112-114). In fact, young literate speakers were found to disfavor the [n] variant at a rate most similar (but not quite as high) as that of men above sixty.

Chapter Five then goes on to investigate likely explanations for the diverging production patterns, including observations on the role of gender in sociolinguistic changes observed elsewhere in the world, such as Nichol's (1976) study on Gullah. Eventually, Reynolds concludes that, while the theories that have emerged from similar socio-variationist studies contribute to an analysis of his study's results, it is equally necessary to consider the local social conditions under which these more broadly understood sociolinguistic constraints emerge and interact in Spearhead. Reynolds concludes that language ideology presents a unifying element influencing the patterns observed for all three parameters - sex, age, and literacy.

Chapter Six further elaborates on language ideology in the wider sphere of Amdo Tibetan and explores how it manifests in specific production behaviors of speakers.

To my knowledge, this is the first study to approach the problem of diachronic change in Tibetan by seeking its roots in socially conditioned synchronic variation. As such, it represents an important contribution to the fields of sociolinguistics as well as Tibetan linguistics.

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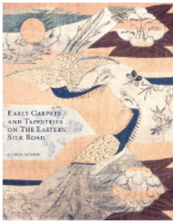
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REVIEW: *EARLY CARPETS AND TAPESTRIES  
ON THE EASTERN SILK ROAD*

Reviewed by Juha Komppa (Academic Visitor,  
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Gloria Gonick. 2016. *Early Carpets and Tapestries on the Eastern Silk Road*. Woodbridge: ACC Artbooks. Foreword (John E Vollmer), Wutun Paintings (John E. Hatherley). 172 pp, 6 maps, 200 illustrations. ISBN-10: 1851498109, ISBN-13: 978-1851498109 (hardcover, USD70).

Gloria Gonick's book is the result of a series of detailed studies of some of the surviving Chinese Manichaean textiles, both in Japan and China.<sup>1</sup> It has an ambitious composition and offers much more than the title announces.

Less glamorous and more tribal than the many more studied luxury textiles, a mysterious group of thirty-six early painted tapestries and twenty-one carpets - all woolen - forms the focus of this study. They have been kept in Kyoto since the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, as part of the local Gion Festival floats' decorations and have until recently been understood as ink-painted tapestries from Korea and regional wool-pile carpets from western China. Indeed, the Japanese notion of the tapestries as Korean made perfect sense in so far as the Japanese having acquired them largely from Korea in centuries past.<sup>2</sup> In this context, it is worthwhile to mention Thomas

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Komppa, Juha. 2017. Review: Early Carpets And Tapestries on the Eastern Silk Road. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 45:159-171.

<sup>1</sup> This is a book length, expanded version of her research, drawing in parts on her previous papers on early Chinese Manichaean textiles held in Kyoto as well as those produced later on the southern coastal China in Fujian; see Gonick (2009) and (2014), respectively.

<sup>2</sup> The Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) outlawed Manichaean religion and banned its trappings. Consequently, most of the textiles were collected and destroyed, with some sold to foreign, Korean and Japanese traders. Thus the

Cole, who argues for a change in focus on Tibetan rugs from the conventional references to both Chinese and Buddhist influence. Instead, he suggests that the Tibetan weaving tradition should be viewed in a Central Asian tribal context.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Gonick looks for the provenance beyond Korea and successfully traces all of these textiles back to Gansu in China. This new provenance is a significant contribution of her study. Another is contextualizing the textiles within the Manichaeian religion and the material culture it gave rise to. It is these textiles, seen and understood at long last as Manichaeian relics, and preserved in China and Japan, that are the subject of her book.

After a glowing foreword by John E Vollmer – an internationally recognized curator and scholar in the fields of Asian art, textiles, and dress – and Gonick's own brief introduction, which both (to lesser and greater extent, respectively) set out the premises of her research and give the bold outlines of her theory, the book is divided into total of thirteen chapters, most of them quite short.

The ambitious and intricate structuring results in a measure of fragmentation and repetition in the presentation of the material, as well as back-and-forth or unexpected shifts of foci. This is especially the case when ideas are introduced or facts mentioned in passing, yet the designated chapter for a more detailed discussion is located elsewhere in the book.

Gonick's narrative begins in Japan: Chapter One looks at the Gion Festival textile collections in Kyoto and places them in their Japanese cultural context. It discusses these textiles as a whole, the ways they arrived in Japan and how they were subsequently used, and in many cases recorded and studied - except for the two groups of textiles the present book deals with.

Since the links between these enigmatic textiles and Manichaeian influence are mentioned in both the foreword and the introduction, Chapter Two opens on the Chinese mainland with its point of departure being the Uighur migration in the eighth century

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merchants of Kyoto were able to acquire some of the latter, and have used them ever since to adorn their annual Gion Festival procession.

<sup>1</sup> See Cole (1990) and (2004).

from Mongolia to western China, especially the area around Turfan in Xinjiang.<sup>1</sup> Significantly, these Uighurs were Manicheans. Likewise, designs on both the pile carpets and the ink-painted tapestry textiles preserved in Kyoto reflect the beliefs of Mani - similar to the manner in which Buddhist textiles attest to the story of the Buddha. In these textiles there are also references to Tibetan-style Buddhism, and later on to both Daoism and Manichaeism. Thus a sequence of influences is established and linked to historical circumstances that gave rise to them: first the original arrival of the Manichaean Uighurs, subsequent contact with the ethnic Tibetan population and their religion in the Qinghai-Gansu region, and finally the merging of Manichaean motifs with Daoist ones from the Ming Dynasty onwards, when Mani's "Religion of Light" was outlawed and under state persecution.<sup>2</sup>

Chapter Two then turns to the state of studies, past and present, of ancient Manichaean Uighurs and their culture as well as their cultural heirs and descendants down to the present-day – the Monguor.

Whereas Manichaean relics from the Turfan region and Dunhuang are well known, those produced further southeast in the Qinghai-Gansu area (i.e., the Yellow River region, an appellation that describes it well as regards Gonick's work) have received scant

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<sup>1</sup> The history of the discoveries of remains of Manichaean works of art in the Turfan region by the German expeditions in 1902-1914 has been discussed in several accounts. For a recent study on Chinese influences of Uygur Manichaean Art, see Gulácsi (2003); especially, as the Chinese tradition disclosed itself notably in textiles and wall surfaces, as opposed to illuminated manuscripts in the Persian tradition.

<sup>2</sup> In fact, by the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912), Manicheans in the Chinese eyes had become indistinguishable from Nestorian Christians. This disappearance tallies with the notion that Manichaeism died out in China between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. Yet there seems to be nothing that would give rise to the Qing perception in surviving Manichaeism material culture, unlike in some of their beliefs and practices, for Mani had included aspects of Christianity into his theology in a bid to be all-inclusive. This is similar to Tibetan Bon followers adopting many aspects of mainstream Tibetan-style Buddhism in order to survive persecution by the latter. The Manicheans employed Daoist artistic tradition in their art and artifacts from the Ming to today for comparable reasons.

attention.<sup>1</sup> This book thus attempts to redress this imbalance in charting and analysis.<sup>2</sup> What makes any researches into the Uighur past a highly problematic and contentious topic are the current tensions between the Han Chinese and the contemporary Uighur population in China.<sup>3</sup> This is further exacerbated by the contemporary Han notion that the culture as well as the area in this regard is lacking in interest.<sup>4</sup>

This, in turn, shifts the attention to the Monguor (discussed in more detail in Chapter Nine) as descendants of the Manichaeans Uighurs of the Yellow River region and the conquering Mongol soldiers in the early thirteenth century. As Gonick notes: 'The temples, textiles, and the paintings and sculpture they bequeathed to the area reveal today their Uyghur Manichaean inheritance, and provide unique, mostly unexplored body of art.'<sup>5</sup> This understanding is significant throughout the book. It may also to some measure explain the unexpected ending with the Wutun paintings (Chapter Thirteen); as well as the choice of much of the visual material in the survey of Manichaean motifs in the Yellow River region (Chapter Seven).

Chapter Three takes us back to Japan and Kyoto anew with the enigmatic textiles, which are now discussed in some detail for the first time. This is perhaps the most fascinating and substantial single chapter, which analyses the materials and techniques, and discusses

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<sup>1</sup> Gulácsi's study (2003) also concentrates on the finds in the Turfan region.

<sup>2</sup> Gonick (2016:21-22).

<sup>3</sup> This may be a moot point since the arts and artifacts of the present-day Islamic Uighur in Xinjiang bear no resemblance with those of their Manichaean ancestors or the Monguor in Gansu.

<sup>4</sup> This may have less to do with Han chauvinism, and more with the cultural demarcation lines that posit the Yellow River region as a location for things Tibetan and Tibetan-style Buddhism, thus effectively marginalizing, if not excluding, any interest in Manichaeism or the present-day Uighur and Monguor. On the other side of the line lies Dunhuang and Turfan/Bezeklik, which are presented above as sites of Buddhist art, and the focus continues to rest heavily - notably in the case of Dunhuang - on the ancient texts found that the Chinese consider as pre-eminent cultural relics for age-old cultural reasons.

<sup>5</sup> Gonick (2016:21).

motifs while presenting along a visually enhanced view of the pieces referred to. Indeed, the 200 images throughout the book are well chosen, illuminating, and of high quality. The captions are also informative. The painted tapestries are covered first, followed by the pile rugs. While the tapestries reflect Manichaean tradition and ways of use, the rugs are more closely associated with Chinese and Tibetan-style Buddhist imagery and functions.

Interestingly, the Tree of Life depicted on some of these rugs<sup>1</sup> recall the Central Asian influences on Tibetan carpets traced by Cole.<sup>2</sup> Gonick's consideration of color is also of interest. First the Uighur and then the Monguor favored particularly red-orange hues.<sup>3</sup> These are in marked contrast to the Mongol preference for blue and yellow, or the use of the Xinjiang red by latter-day Uighurs, both in their own carpets and many of those intended for the Tibetan market.<sup>4</sup>

Chapter Four returns to the question of provenance in order to corroborate Gonick's theory. Several purported sources for the textiles are presented and convincingly rejected - Korea, Tibetan Buddhist regions, the Mongols - before returning to the Uighurs of old. Gonick also describes her attempts to discover some lingering traces of the Manichaean Uighur past in the Yellow River region, but these are largely unsuccessful.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Gonick (2016:46).

<sup>2</sup> Cole (1990, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> The red-orange color, obtained from safflower, is used for the background of the piece. Upon it, as in the case of the tapestries, was a brilliant multi-colored riot in vibrant shades of red, blue, gold and green, as well as in pink and turquoise - though now all faded. The same palette can be found in Uighur murals and paintings on paper and silk as well as on religious edifices. Gonick singles out the elaborately carved and decorated Chone (Zhuoni) Monastery in Gansu (2016:71-75), but it was likely present also on stately and princely structures.

<sup>4</sup> Notably the tiger carpets for the Tibetan market made in Chinese Turkestan (Xinjiang).

<sup>5</sup> She does make reference to a mandala on the wall at the Luqu Shitshang Monastery (Xicang Si, Luqu) in Gansu. Unfortunately, the book contains no image of this. Her reasoning that this would have been executed by Uighur artist(s) is plausible; certainly Tibetan-style woodcarving in Labrang/Xiahe

Chapter Five continues to investigate the provenance of the Kyoto tapestries in particular, while discussing ink-painted tapestries in China in general. The Gansu Provincial Museum in Lanzhou holds similar textiles similar to the Kyoto ones, and it is surmised by Chinese scholars that they may have originated from Qin'an, near Tianshui in Gansu.<sup>1</sup>

Chapter Six discusses Mani and the "Religion of Light" he founded. This appellation is somewhat misleading, for Manichaeism is above all a belief in the duality of darkness/evil and light/good, even if the worship and protection of the latter is a central theme in Manichaean theology. Moreover, these characteristics of light and dark can be observed in nearly all aspects of Manichaean material culture. In terms of the ink-painted tapestries discussed in Gonick's study, the Manichean themes are expressed through the repetition of images depicting the struggle between light and dark.

Chapter Seven is a straightforward art historical discussion of Manichean motifs in China and those depicted on the Kyoto textiles. Discussed are, among others, the curly grass motif, the Tree of Life, guardian dogs, and the peacock. Curly grass and the guardian dogs are both Buddhist and Chinese as well as Tibetan motifs. The Tree of Life has its provenance in Central Asia. The peacock, in turn, is the most prominent and ubiquitous of Manichean motifs, and Gonick presents an intriguing array of peacock motifs, drawn mostly from the Tibetan Buddhist context.

Chapter Eight is a brief taking stock halfway: an open-ended summing up around a central theme. Gonick begins it with a list of pertinent points and unanswered questions, which remain unanswered as far as what she has established to this point, apart from the Kyoto textiles not originating in Korea. The chapter has a piecemeal quality. After an interlude of remarks related to her fieldwork, she moves beyond China, listing museum collections with ink-painted tapestries the world over. The contents are all valid, but

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for instance is now done by Han Chinese from out of town, and not by Tibetans.

<sup>1</sup> Gonick (2016:68-70).

the presentation lacks depth. Only in Moscow does she find confirmation for her theory as regards tracing the provenance of the textiles to the Uighur.

Chapter Nine moves back to the Yellow River region and the Monguor in Gansu - the "Turco-Mongol Buddhists in Northwestern China," as the chapter's subtitle classifies them.<sup>1</sup> The chapter opens with the observation of clothing often preserving older designs that disappear elsewhere in the material culture of a given group. It is thus through garments and embroidery that Gonick arrives at the recognition that the Monguor tradition carries a close affinity with the Kyoto textiles.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, their Tibetan Buddhist monastic architecture carries on ancient Uighur traits to the present-day. Interesting as the chapter is, the text is also very impressionistic.<sup>3</sup>

Chapter Ten takes the reader back to Japan and to another formal analysis of the Kyoto ink-painted woolen tapestries, which were discussed in Chapter Four in some detail. The pile rugs, however, are not revisited.

In Chapter Eleven, the Chinese painted tapestries produced in Jiangnan and the southeastern coast down to Fujian from the twelfth to twentieth century are touched upon. This sweep in time and space features much piecemeal information, but the overall view is that the Uighur weavers' ink painting and block printing techniques in producing the textiles remained, but the decoration and themes changed from Manichaeism to almost exclusively Daoist over the course of time.

Intriguingly, too, while the movement of textile workers with a Uighur background on the whole was from northwestern and northern China to Jiangnan and the southeastern coastal areas, Gonick also mentions Monguor who migrated back to Qinghai from Jiangnan in the Ming Dynasty. Presumably they may have been Manicheans to

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<sup>1</sup> Gonick (2016:104).

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed study of Monguor textile tradition and embroideries, see Pullinen (2015).

<sup>3</sup> A wavering quality, repetitiveness, and lack of fully thought-out structure become more apparent in later chapters - they would have benefitted from further editing.

whom the distant Gansu offered more freedom and less danger of religious persecution by the new Chinese rulers.

Here Gonick charts both temporal and geographical moves in terms of the production of Manichean art and artifacts in China, and of the people making them.

Chapter Twelve presents the conclusions of the study in eleven points. These concisely recap the pivotal arguments and evidence with clarity in support of Gonick's theory identifying the source of the Kyoto textiles in northwest China's Gansu and Qinghai provinces along the eastern leg of the Silk Road. Ten of the points relate to the tapestries and sum up relevant facts regarding materials, manufacture, design, and function. One point (8) deals with the export and movement of the pieces that conveyed them to Japan. Another (10) discusses what Gonick terms "splinter production," referring to the migrant Uighur textile production in Jiangnan and the southeastern coast between the Song Dynasty (960-1279) and Minguo (the Republican period, 1912-1949).

The final point (11) concludes with regard to the audience carpets made by the Monguor in the Yellow River region for use as sitting carpets for high lamas (so-called "Living Buddhas").

But the book does not end here. Instead, there is a final chapter (13) - actually an afterword by a different author - introducing paintings in Upper Wutun Monastery, near Rebkong (Tongren) in Qinghai Province, and in so doing provides an example of the Rebkong school of Tibetan Buddhist art, believed varying to date back to the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries.

This final tangent presents a puzzle – why is it there?

Its author, John E Hatherley, offers as *raison d'être* his view that "Rebkong pictorial art and the Buddhist art of the Amdo region are fascinating subjects that warrant further detailed study" (159). While this is a valid point, I am unconvinced that the closing pages of Gonick's book are the right platform for Hatherley's call for such attention. These paintings have little to do with Gonick's lines of argument or her own remarks about the monastery, and even less with

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the textiles she seeks to fathom. In short, Chapter Thirteen would have been best left out.

Since it nonetheless is part of the book, I will offer a few thoughts. Its key assertion would seem to be its opening line of reasoning:

Although the paintings at Upper Wutun Monastery shown in chapters Seven and Nine appear in a Monguor temple and the Monguor were once Manichaeans, by the time these were painted the populace thought of themselves as Tibetan Buddhist and they were painted to honor Tibetan Buddhist deities (157).

Gonick touches on Upper Wutun Monastery and Chapter Seven contains a single drawing (7.20) depicting Manichaean-style Crosses of Light found on the temple. Chapter Nine includes photographs of the monastery precincts (9.24) and a further image of a temple doorway (9.25) that is vague in terms of the point that is intended. Most of the photographs (9.28-9.35) present various aspects of a typical Tibetan-style temple edifice in the region. Only 9.36 shows again the Manichaean-style crosses as part of the temple's ornamental bracketing (*dougong*).

However, Gonick's text is in some ways more illuminating about her arguments than any of the images, when she writes:

There is much confusion and little documentation as to what degree of assimilation actually went on in the Mongol-Uyghur communities. However, it is irrefutable that Uyghur stylish traits and Uyghur Manichaean motifs are ubiquitous on Monguor [...] temple architecture to the present time (112).

And that "[a]lthough most of the Monguor people profess Tibetan Buddhism, it seems that Manichaean concepts have nevertheless survived underground in a small percentage of the population" (113).

Both statements appear to be somewhat at odds with Hatherley's claims.

As I have noted elsewhere, while the notion of seemingly unchanging cultural traditions may be questioned, it is also important to question change and examine the ways in which, at different times and under different circumstances, it occurs.<sup>1</sup> Upper Wutun Monastery provides an intriguing case in point.<sup>2</sup> But the critical question - to what extent the ancient Uighur Manichaean beliefs and artistic traditions may have survived, in however much reconfigured guises - is likely to remain beyond definite answer.

In that light, there remains one other possibility: that by way of incorporating the final chapter, Gonick elegantly acknowledges the fact of the Tibetan Buddhist dominance prevailing in the area, despite her own interests in searching for any Manichaean traces lingering in the local communities.

I close my review with final remarks in relation to the book in its entirety. Gonick's arguments are well and extensively presented in the early chapters. The provenance in China is convincingly argued for, and Manichaeism as religion and original context for the pieces is discussed in rich detail. Following Chapter Six, there are a number of parts that provide the data and examples for the arguments already presented, without adding much new information, except in terms of visual images. As noted earlier, the book is lavishly and excellently illustrated.

On a more personal note, as Philip Glazebrook has so perceptibly observed: "Very little of the mystery of a place or an idea

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<sup>1</sup> Komppa (2010:258).

<sup>2</sup> Wutun Shang Si 'Upper Wutun Monastery' was established in 1648. Lower Monastery dates originally from 1381. However, Upper Monastery was burnt in 1946 and subsequently restored in 1949. More damage occurred in 1958. Lower Monastery was partially rebuilt and restored in 1981. No exact information is given for Upper Monastery. Both monasteries were opened to visitors (tourists) in 1987 (PRHA 1898, Pu 1990:434-435). The Upper Monastery has undergone significant renovation, for instance, in the early 2010s. Consequently, the contemporary Upper Monastery edifice is not very old.

survives the scrutiny required to sort out and put into words what was it about that mystery sufficiently intriguing to have compelled you to write about it" (1985:171). His reflection finely captures the accomplishment of Gloria Gonick's book. She has taken on a fascinating, if obscure and little studied subject, and while unfolding the true identity and the changing context and meanings of these textiles, replaced much of the mystery surrounding them with knowledge based on well-reasoned arguments and candid fieldwork. As such, despite certain shortcomings,<sup>1</sup> *Early Carpets and Tapestries on the Eastern Silk Road* is a fine piece of scholarly detection, and merits careful reading.

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<sup>1</sup> Outright errors include two maps of China that both misplace and misspell several locations. Map 9.2 (106) gives both Xiahe and Labrang as two distinctly different sites, which is not only superfluous, but also places them geographically the wrong way around in relation to one another. On the same map, the spelling of 'Taklaan Lhamo' is a curious choice: as opposed to either Taktsang Lhamo (for correctness) or Langmusi (for clarity and consistency). Map 11.2 (136) contains more serious errors: both Shanghai and Ningbo are quite out of place; the two Hangzhou are very confusing - the one in Fujian surely being actually Fuzhou, while the correct Hangzhou in Zhejiang is somewhat off the mark. These, however, do not diminish the importance of Gonick's book.

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## NON-ENGLISH TERMS

*dougong* 斗拱

Dunhuang 敦煌

Fujian 福建

Fuzhou 福州

Gansu 甘肃

Jiangnan 江南

Langmusi/Taktsang Lhamo 郎木寺, stag tshang lha mo ལྷག་ཚང་ལྷ་མོ།

Luqu 碌曲

Ming 明

Minguo 民国

Monguor 蒙古尔

Ningbo 宁波

Qin'an 秦安

Qing 清

Qinghai 青海

Shanghai 上海

Song 宋

Tianshui 天水

Tongren/Rebkong 同仁, reb gong རེབ་གོང་།

Turfan 吐鲁番

Wutun Shangsi 五屯上寺

Xiahe 夏河, Labrang, bla brang bkra shis 'khyil ལྷ་བླང་བཀྲ་ཤིས་ཀྱི་ཁྱིལ་།

Xicang Si 西仓寺

Xinjiang 新疆

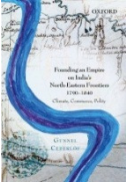
Zhejiang 浙江

Zhuoni/Chone 卓尼, co ne ཅོ་ནེ།

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REVIEW: *FOUNDING AN EMPIRE ON INDIA'S  
NORTH-EASTERN FRONTIERS 1790-1840*

Reviewed by Hilary Howes (Australian National University)



Gunnel Cederlöf. 2014. *Founding an Empire on India's North-Eastern Frontiers 1790-1840: Climate, Commerce, Polity*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. xvi + 273pp, 5 maps, 1 illustration, glossary, bibliography, index. ISBN: 978-0-19-809057-1 (hardcover 23.99GBP).

This thoroughly researched and carefully constructed monograph focuses on what is now north-eastern India, an irregularly-shaped region joined only by a narrow neck of land to the remainder of the Indian subcontinent and jostled (or nestled, depending on one's point of view) between Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, Nepal, and Tibet. Crucially, author Gunnel Cederlöf argues, this representation of north-east India on modern maps - an island in constant danger of drifting away from mainland India, held in place only by the "Chicken's Neck" or Siliguri Corridor - bears no relation to the way in which this region was imagined by the British East India Company (EIC) in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Having obtained revenue-farming rights and judicial duties over the North-Eastern Frontier, as it was then known, through a 1765 *diwani* grant from the Great Mughal in Delhi, the EIC aspired first and foremost to revive the administration of revenue in the region, adding a monopoly in territory to their existing monopolies in the eastern trade. Given these primarily commercial interests, it should come as no surprise that the EIC's map-makers, their eyes fixed on the web of lucrative trade routes crisscrossing the region, homed in on the North-Eastern Frontier as the central point in "a synoptic vision that connected Bengal to China" (72).

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Howes, Hilary. 2017. Review: *Founding an Empire on India's North-Eastern Frontiers*. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 45:172-180.

Against this background, Cederlöf examines "the ways in which north-east Bengal and the neighboring kingdoms came under the control of the British EIC," exploring both "the enabling and constraining conditions of climate and ecology" and "the administrative practices which formed into governing polities and sovereign-subject relations" (4-5). She argues for the necessity of a broad geographical scope in understanding the history of this part of the world, emphasizing particularly the interconnectedness of north-east India and north-east Bengal, two regions dealt with separately in most scholarly works to date, and the increasing recognition of a need to "focus in new ways on the region connecting India and China" by "put[ting] aside the limitations created by the combination of a sharp nation-state focus and an academic regional studies framework" (10-11). In addition, she seeks to challenge the prevailing tendency to view imperial power in British India "from its summit" in the late nineteenth century by drawing attention to the ways in which the EIC's actions over the preceding century - "inconsistent, strongly challenged, and driven by contradictory interests" - shaped bureaucratic practices and legal frameworks (6).

The period under study, 1790-1840, commences with the revenue surveys conducted by the EIC in the 1790s, which first established large-scale bureaucratic control of north-east Bengal and its neighboring kingdoms, and concludes with vigorous debates about bureaucratic reform in the 1830s. Despite the passage of some 200 years since the abovementioned revenue surveys were conducted, recent reports of insurgent violence in Manipur highlight characteristics of this region today that are equally pertinent to Cederlöf's analysis, specifically its "geographical distance" from centers of government power (now New Delhi, then the imperial center at Calcutta) and its "long porous borders" with neighboring countries (TNN 2015). Cederlöf addresses these characteristics in part by contrasting the bird's-eye view of the EIC governing bodies in Calcutta with the day-to-day struggles of district officers in Cachar, Jaintia, and Manipur. The former were interested in the north-east primarily in terms of its relationship to Burma and China, seeing it alternately as a

valuable entry point to lucrative markets or a buffer against attacks by hostile neighboring powers; in their view, the "petty cultivators" inhabiting this "transition zone" could legitimately be subdued by force in order to meet higher goals (184). In contrast, district officials such as IG Burns, Superintendent of Cachar during the 1830s, struggled to establish trust amongst local landholders and to introduce the elements of a basic civil administration, including a police force and a local court. While Calcutta's physical distance from the North-Eastern Frontier allowed stereotypical images of the region and its inhabitants to proliferate, closer to the frontier "these static images of people and places began to chafe against everyday experiences" (72).

In analyzing the ways in which this friction between static images and everyday experiences played out, Cederlöf pays particular attention to environmental conditions. The North-Eastern Frontier, she argues, was and remains "a region characterized by water;" then and now, "the possibilities and limitations of human life" were determined by the annual monsoon, "with people adjusting their livelihood strategies to the regularity and unpredictability of the rains" (8). However, the flexible lifeways necessitated by these seasonal changes, which saw river courses shift and cultivated fields become lakes, were frequently ignored in the production of official EIC documents.

This theme is addressed in detail in chapters Two, 'The Order and Disaster of Nature', and Five, 'Bureaucratic Control and Its Mismatch with Nature'. Here, Cederlöf contrasts outside observers' perceptions of nature on the North-East Frontier with the approach of EIC officers sent to conduct military and revenue surveys. While the former recorded a wide range of "exceptional weather conditions and unusual climatic events," including a devastating earthquake in 1762, severe droughts in 1769-1770, and a series of major floods during the years 1784-1789, the latter "searched for normal situations and stable conditions" and "seem[ed] only to have had eyes for cultivated fields that could be subject to revenue assessment" (32).

The regulatory fruits of their endeavors, the Decennial and Permanent Settlements of 1790 and 1793, respectively, were designed

to establish permanent revenue classes for land: *abadee* 'cultivated' land was seen as productive and was therefore assessable for tax purposes, whereas land considered *purreah* 'fallow' or *jungla* 'waste' was tax-free. Unfortunately for the collectors subsequently charged with extracting revenue payments from their subjects, the rigid bureaucratic categories posited by the Settlements seldom conformed to the situation on the ground: "land classed as cultivated could turn into lakes, fallows be broken up and cultivated, river flood plains either cropped or swept away during the rains, and forest land used for all kinds of purposes" (132).

Simplistic administrative frameworks also clashed with the complex realities of existing social relations. Although the *diwani* grant of 1765 had conferred on the EIC the honors and obligations of the previous *nawab* 'governor' of Bengal, his social powers - "deeply rooted in society and made legitimate by a multitude of ties connected in a social web based on tacitly accepted norms" – could not be so easily transplanted (123). This "deep integration of land relations into social and religious status hierarchies" was a source of considerable irritation to district officials (140). The collector in Sylhet, for example, was much annoyed to discover that twenty square kilometers of land in the district were claimed as *lakhiraj* 'rent-free', having been granted to individuals by the *nawab* in exchange for services as diverse as keeping lamps burning at night in the Muslim mosques, feeding travelers, performing worship and sacrifices in Hindu temples, and keeping revenue accounts. He ruled the latter category of land rights invalid, arguing that these appointments had been abolished when the EIC succeeded to government, but was unable to interfere with the others.

In addition to these administrative difficulties, the EIC also had to contend with open hostility from multiple quarters, resulting in some cases from intervention in pre-existing conflicts, in others from land disputes and clashes over the profits of intensified trade. In Chapter Three, 'Making 'Natural' Boundaries', Cederlöf follows EIC officers as they advanced to take charge of the former Mughal territories, an ambition complicated not only by a lack of manpower

and arms, but by the difficulties of establishing the old Mughal boundaries so many years after the fall of the *nawab*. In Rangpur District to the west, government servant David Scott waded into a decades-long dispute between local Garos and *zamindars* 'landholders', finally deciding that the only solution was to separate them entirely.

In Tripura to the south, cotton growers who attempted to cultivate land near the limits of EIC territory were attacked and killed by followers of the local raja, who claimed the land as his sovereign domain. The Raja of Jaintia to the north, who exacted duties from boats passing through his territories, was forced to escape into the hills after Collector of Sylhet, William Thackeray, took military action against him, ignoring explicit instructions to the contrary from the Court of Directors. Conflicts in Cachar to the east, impacted by a protracted battle over the throne between the princes of nearby Manipur, proved particularly intransigent. On top of this, EIC military forces were fighting Burmese troops on three fronts between 1823 and 1826.

In Chapter Four, 'The Land Between Rivers', Cederlöf deals with efforts in the 1830s to overcome the aftermath of the Anglo-Burmese war by sending out expeditions to revive trade networks leading from the port towns of Bengal to the significant Chinese commercial center of Kunming. An extraordinary range of animal, vegetable, and mineral goods - gold, silver, copper, tin, lead, limestone, amber, jade, ruby, marble, elephant tusks, horses, spices, salt, silk, opium, cloth, lumber, cane, and bamboo - were traded along these networks. The EIC's agents were successful in some respects, notably building roads at relatively low cost, but less so in others: their efforts to reopen old routes between Cachar and Assam led to armed resistance from Naga communities, while central Cachar became "a playground for unscrupulous merchants," forcing the local superintendent to spend the bulk of his time "catch[ing] up with and put[ting] out the fires caused by entrepreneurs trying to take advantage of the situation" (107, 112).

Chapter Six, 'Commerce and War', pursues themes introduced in chapters Three and Four, detailing the EIC's annexation of the "resource-rich and strategically located smaller autonomous polities of Jaintia, Cachar, and Manipur and the territories of the many Khasi chiefs," all of which were located beyond the easternmost borders of the former *nawab's* territories (162). While some conflicts, such as those relating to the lucrative but dangerous limestone industry, simmered just below the surface for decades, others erupted into sudden and shocking violence. In 1829, a British convalescent station at Nongkhlaw was attacked by a body of Khasis and most of the residents massacred. It is not entirely clear whether this event, which became known as the "Nongkhlaw Outrage," took place despite an agreement signed in 1826 between David Scott and the chief of Nongkhlaw, U Tirut Singh, or because of it. Suggested causes of the conflict ranged from "rumours of taxation being introduced in the Khasi Hills" and "the disrespectful language of Company servants" to "violent conflicts in the foothills" between hill chiefs and nearby villages (171).

A further incident in 1832, interpreted (probably wrongly) by the British as a case of human sacrifice, led to the formal annexation of Jaintia, though this administrative change was largely ignored by people in the hills. Although the EIC was able to force many Khasi chiefs into submission over the period 1829-1834, it had no noticeable success in establishing relations with anyone other than the chiefs, and no particular interest in doing so. Winning wars, as Cederlöf sagely notes, "was quite a different matter from establishing functioning rule," and the EIC's focus of commercial, military, and imperial interests meant that "relations to subjects were of low, if any, priority" (183, 202).

Cederlöf's seventh and final chapter, 'The Fiscal Subject and the Absent Citizen', draws together elements of the preceding chapters to consider the quality of governance exercised by the EIC on the North-Eastern Frontier. Subject formation under EIC rule, she argues, was influenced by four branches of debate: firstly, ideological discussions about the rights and freedoms of British subjects; secondly,

the EIC's interest, as a corporation, in securing monopolistic power; thirdly, the difficulty of eliminating pre-existing Mughal privileges embedded in land and socio-economic networks; and finally, the need to form relations with people living on the North-Eastern Frontier through administrative practice. The interactions between these four branches led to a preoccupation, amongst district administrators, with "defining the extent and boundaries of landholdings," which in turn led to the creation of a primarily fiscal subject - that is, one whose chief distinguishing characteristic was his or her ability to pay revenue (232-233).

This emphasis on revenue enabled the EIC to "build on a local experience of subjecthood to a distant overlord with fiscal demands" in the territories included in the Mughal grant, leading eventually to the development of legal institutions and the growth of legal rights of subjects (241). In the neighboring polities, however, this was not the case. There, in the absence of comparable local experiences of subjecthood on which to build, both the government and the ruler-subject relations that developed under EIC control were relatively weak. The long-term legacies of these "dual polities ... under one government," Cederlöf suggests, could fruitfully form the basis of further scholarship (241).

The extraordinary complexity of environmental, commercial and socio-political conditions across the North-Eastern Frontier, together with the diversity of EIC responses to the challenges this complexity posed, threatens at times to descend into a seemingly impenetrable forest of details. However, Cederlöf's talent for lively description of specific individuals and events helps readers to navigate her sometimes dense prose. The image that stuck most firmly in my mind was that of James Rennell's cartographic survey of 1764, the first comprehensive mapping of Bengal undertaken by the British. Initially published in 1779 under the title *A Bengal Atlas*, Rennell's maps were reprinted unchanged in 1788 and 1793, despite the fact that a series of floods during the years 1784-1789 had altered the course of several major river systems, reshaping the topography of the region to such an extent as to make the maps essentially useless for practical purposes.

Clearly, Cederlöf points out, the later editions of these maps were intended primarily "to represent an imagined landscape ... for a British market" rather than to help orient readers "in a real landscape" (23).

Other memorable figures include Captain Francis Jenkins, who suggested that the "uncivilized tribes" of the North-Eastern Frontier would benefit from radical social reorganization: the Khasis, for example, should simply be resettled *en masse* to Assam from the hills, and the resulting vacancy filled by "more improved races." I also enjoyed Cederlöf's description of the Duffa Gam, chief of one of the principal Singpho clans occupying the hills east of Upper Assam, who counteracted the EIC's attempts to woo him away from his recognition of Burmese sovereignty by diplomatically avoiding contact with visiting EIC representative, GJ Bayfield, wherever possible and filling any unavoidable meetings with endless small talk.

Credit must also be given to Cederlöf for the impressively broad range of sources she has consulted. These include, but are not limited to, documents with performative statements (orders, treaties, verdicts); documents issued by EIC governing bodies (board minutes, department notes, government orders); reports to government from officers on tour (surveyors' memoirs, revenue survey reports, army officers' reports); and accounts produced by officers at local levels (diaries, local and regional correspondence). The concerns and agendas of landlords and rajas are embedded in petitions and correspondence with government collectors and agents; those of non-elite individuals appear in court records. Notwithstanding the richness of this material, Cederlöf is careful to acknowledge its limitations, noting that sources in the vernacular languages of north-east India are few and far between, that those which do exist are seldom unfiltered by "dominant communities or ... Assamese or Bengali narrators," and that much of "what went on in the past" must inevitably "be left to our informed guesses or to oblivion" (8).

In short, *Founding an Empire on India's North-Eastern Frontiers* is not an easy read, but it is certainly a worthwhile one. The wide range of topics it addresses will interest and inform not only students of Indian and South-East Asian history, commerce, and

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politics, but also those interested more broadly in empire and settler colonialism, environmental history, legal and administrative history, the making and unmaking of borders, and the cartographic expression of alternative spatial imaginations.

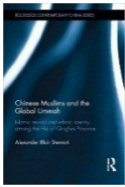
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 REVIEW: *CHINESE MUSLIMS AND THE GLOBAL UMMAH*

Reviewed by: Bianca Horlemann (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin)



Alexander Blair Stewart. 2017. *Chinese Muslims and the Global Ummah. Islamic Revival and Ethnic Identity among the Hui of Qinghai Province*. Routledge Contemporary China Series, London: Routledge, IX + 221. ISBN 978-1-138-64638-4 (hardcover 90£).

This monograph is an important contribution to the field of Islam studies in China and provides thought-provoking insights on the Islamic revival movement in twenty-first century Xining, the capital of Qinghai Province. It has a special focus on the contemporary Salafiyya and Tablighi Jama'at movements, which remain understudied in the context of China.

The anthropologist Stewart immersed himself in the Muslim community of Xining as participant observer for eleven months (apparently between 2012-2013<sup>1</sup>). In eight chapters, he vividly describes different aspects of the Islamic revival movement based on individual examples. He examines how the younger generation of Muslims and new Muslim converts are especially attracted by Islamic revivalist ideas of the Salafiyya and Tablighi Jama'at and how they participate in these movements.

Chapter One provides a short, well-informed overview of contemporary Islam in China in general and more specifically, of the Islamic landscape in the greater Xining area. The chapter also addresses the ambiguity of the term Hui, which to most people in China denotes both an ethnicity and a religious group. According to Stewart, reaffirmed Muslims are often critical of ethnic Hui for whom being Muslim is merely an unexamined and unquestioned part of their identity. Some are neither very pious nor do they follow strict Islamic rules, for example, they might smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol, and not

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Horlemann, Bianca. 2017. Review: Chinese Muslims and the Global Ummah. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 45:181-185.

<sup>1</sup> This is inferred from the dates that the author provides (e.g., page 184).

always fast during Ramadan. Consequently, many revivalists make a clear distinction between Hui as an ethnic term and *musilin* for those of Islamic faith and *xin musilin* for Muslim converts.

Chapter Two offers a glance at the historical development of the so-called Old and New Teachings in northwest China, which are described by the author as successive "tides" or "modes" of Islam. Apart from the Yihewani, who constitute the predominant Islamic group in Xining, and the Gedimu and Sufi groups, who dominate in the countryside, Stewart also introduces the Salafiyya and the Tablighi Jama'at movements in more detail. The author also describes how sectarian differences continue to create divisions among devout Muslims in northwest China despite their endeavor to present a façade of Muslim unity to outsiders.

Chapter Three deals with the central question of why a rising number of Muslims in China seek to reaffirm their Islamic faith. Two individual examples demonstrate how Islam is considered a modern, alternative non-Chinese way of living and how contact with Salafi study groups provided impetus to redefine a modern Islamic identity.

Chapter Four examines the role of *ahongs* 'Islamic teachers', and mosque communities and their attitudes towards Islamic revival movements. In addition, it further examines the motivation of *manla* 'religious students'.

The self-professed apolitical and non-sectarian movement of the Tablighi Jama'at is the focus of Chapter Five. Roughly translated as "society for spreading Faith," this movement originated in South Asia in the 1920s and lacks dedicated mosques, *ahongs*, and educational institutions. It proselytizes through study groups, "visits," and *jama'at* 'itinerating tours' of three, ten or forty days, or four months of length. The *da'wah* 'missionizing' work is done in groups of four to ten people and aims, first of all, at the renewal of the participant's own faith, which is thought to be more important than actual conversions. In contrast to study in the Salafiyya method, which is text-based and introverted, the Tablighi Jama'at is more extroverted and experimental, which draws criticism from Salafis and other

Muslims as unorthodox. While the Salafiyya appeal to better-educated Muslims, the Tablighis tend to attract the less well-educated.

In Chapter Six, the author describes and speculates about the motivations of Muslim converts and of those who alter their sectarian affiliation, for example, from Yihewani to Salafiyya. Again, Stewart provides several individual examples that illustrate his points.

Chapter Seven deals with the attitudes of Chinese Muslims toward the Chinese state. The author claims that most Chinese Muslims are simultaneously critical of the CCP as an atheist party but nevertheless, are very patriotic toward the Chinese nation. The author also describes the difficulties experienced by Chinese Muslims in government service, who want to be devout in practice, but cannot overtly display their Islamic identity at their work place.

The author concludes in Chapter Eight that many, especially young, Chinese Muslims who are disillusioned with Chinese socialism and perceive a lack of morality in neocapitalist China reaffirm their Islamic identity as a conscious, individual choice. In this process and in the face of their marginalization by an atheist state in a predominantly Han nation, many Chinese Muslims prefer to imagine themselves as part of a global ummah with which they share the goal to "return" to a pure, authentic Islam. The Islamic revival movements of the Salafiyya and the Tablighi Jama'at both cater to this desire.

Throughout the book the author argues that the Islamic revival that he experienced in Xining is foremost an expression of individuality and modernity and is largely apolitical. The search for an "authentic" Islam should not be confused with radical Islam that seeks a violent jihad against non-believers. Although several experts on Islam in China agree with this assumption in general,<sup>1</sup> they also point to the changing political climate in which Salafism, worldwide and in China, has become increasingly associated with Islamic State radicalism and terrorism, especially after the terrorist attack allegedly staged by Uyghur Salafis in China's Yunnan Province in 2014. Meanwhile, Chinese Salafis, who are estimated to number from

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<sup>1</sup> See Erie (2016) and Dru Gladney as quoted by Jonathan Kaiman in the *Los Angeles Times* (<https://goo.gl/wXoAcb>, accessed 14 December 2016).

thousands to tens of thousands, have come under close surveillance by the Chinese state, which has already closed several Salafi religious schools and detained a prominent Salafi cleric in Gansu Province in recent years. In this context, the monograph has already been outpaced by recent events and sadly, the author's assumptions about the alleged apoliticism of Chinese Salafis appear questionable if not naïve. In fact, the Tablighi Jama'at has also been eyed with suspicion in some Central Asian countries like Kazakhstan in recent years,<sup>1</sup> and most probably this movement has come under scrutiny by the Chinese state as well.

Therefore, the adherents of the revival movements should not be confused with mainstream Islam in northwest China or in China in general. Even in the urban setting of Xining, Salafis and Tablighis are small minorities within the Muslim communities and, as reported by Stewart, meet with substantial rejection and distrust from the established Muslim communities. Furthermore, the majority of Muslims in northwest China do not live in urban areas. They live in the countryside and mainly adhere to Gedimu, Yihewani, and Sufi teachings. The reader thus must be aware that the subtitle of the book is somewhat misleading and that its focus on the Salafiyya and the Tablighi Jama'at movements of urban Xining does not reflect typical Qinghai Muslim communities.

I would like to note that the recurrent use of the term "sect" for Muslim and other religious groups seems unsuitable in the context of this book because of its negative connotations. Furthermore, a glossary for Chinese and Arabic terms would have been desirable since explanations of Chinese and Arabic terms like *santai*, *da'wah*, and *manla* are not easily accessible through use of the index.

These latter points are, however, minor and do not diminish the overall achievements of this monograph. It is at once a plea and a tool for a better understanding of the internal complexities among Chinese Muslims. It is well-written and -structured and the many individual examples that are given are remarkable. Stewart skillfully highlights what it means to be 'Hui' or *musilin* in China from the point

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, <https://goo.gl/rjQBEi> (accessed 14 December 2016).

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of view of Chinese Islamic revivalists. The book is outstanding in its pioneering study of the Tablighi Jama'at movement in China, which has largely escaped the attention of researchers until now.

The book is a must for those studying Islam in China and in northwest China specifically. It is also highly recommended for students of the global Islamic revival movement and those with a special interest in Salafism and the Tablighi Jama'at movement.

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## FILM REVIEWS

REVIEW: *THARLO* AND *THE SACRED ARROW*

Reviewed by Khashem Gyal



Pema Tseden (Pad+ma tshe brtan པདྨ་ཙེ་བརྟན།; director and screenplay), Lü Songye 吕松野 (cinematography), Gdugs dkar tshe ring གདུག་པ་ཙེ་རིང་། (sound designer), Song Bing 宋冰 (editor), Stag rtse don 'grub ལྷ་རེ་དོན་གྲུབ། (production designer), Zhi bde nyi ma ཞི་བདེ་ཉི་མ་ and G.yang phyug mtsho གཡང་ཕུག་མཚོ། (performers), and Wu Leilei 吴蕾蕾 and Wang Xuebo 王学博 (producers). 2015 *Tharlo* ཐལ་ལོ།. International sales: Asian Shadows. 123 mins. B&W.



Pema Tseden (Pad+ma tshe brtan པདྨ་ཙེ་བརྟན།; director and screenplay), Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho སངས་རྒྱལ་རྒྱ་མཚོ། (executive producer), Hodoyama Yiho (Chengshan Yifan) 程山依凡 (production designer), Luo Pan 罗攀 (director of photography), Ricky Ho (He Guojie) 何国杰 (music), Gdugs dkar tshe ring གདུག་པ་ཙེ་རིང་། (sound), Liu Fang 刘芳 (editor), Rin chen don grub རིན་ཆེན་དོན་གྲུབ།, Bsod nmas nyi ma བསོད་ནམས་ཉི་མ་, and Bde skyid བདེ་སྦྱིད།, Stobs rgyas ལྷོ་བས་རྒྱལ།, Blo bzang chos 'phel ལྷོ་བཟང་ཆོས་འཕེལ། (performers). 2014. *G.yang mda'* གཡང་མདའ། [*The Sacred Arrow*]. Production company: Beijing Himalaya Audio & Visual Culture Communication Co., Ltd. 97 minutes.

Khashem Gyal. 2017. Review: *Tharlo* and the *Sacred Arrow*. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 45:187-209.

Pema Tseden was born in 1969 in, at that time, the relatively remote Mdzo sna (Zuona) Village, La zhi ba (Laxiwa) Township, Khri ka (Guide) County, Mtsho lho (Hainan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, China in an area of great natural beauty on the banks of the Rma chu (Yellow River). Pema Tseden recalls his grandfather as an adept lay tantric practitioner whose compassion and warm-heartedness deeply affected him:

My grandfather believed that I was the reincarnation of his grandfather. He told me that my previous life was that of a meditator. Grandfather showed me the scriptures that his own grandfather had used in his life and my great-grandfather's meditation place in our home. My grandfather's grandfather was very good to him and he felt that he owed him a debt. Grandfather insisted my previous life had gained a great deal of religious knowledge. Thus, he also wanted me to be well-educated. At that time, you could be employed after junior middle school so very few students continued on to senior middle school, let alone attended college (Feng 2015).<sup>1</sup>

Pema Tseden continued schooling after graduating from his village school and completed a college education, thanks to significant financial and emotional support from his grandfather. This was at a time when many rural Tibetans questioned the value of formal state-sponsored education.

Folktales have played a vital role in Pema Tseden's literary endeavors and filmmaking. In his childhood, there were few media entertainment resources, however, folktales such as those in the *Ro sgrung* 'Enchanted Corpse'<sup>2</sup> told by older family members in his family were an inspiring source of entertainment. Pema recalls accidentally finding a torn, worn-out old book on the road by his village

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<sup>1</sup> This is my abridged translation of the Chinese. Pema Tseden also shared parts of this same narrative when I interviewed him in May 2016.

<sup>2</sup> The "Enchanted Corpse" collection of tales have long interested scholars involved with Buddhism and verbal culture in southern and central Asia (Mikos 2012:5). For a modern version retold in English, see Benson (2007).

when he was in junior middle school. At first, he did not know what the book was, but then he later realized it was a Chinese-language version of *One Thousand and One Nights*. Its compelling stories created an invisible world and deeply attracted Pema Tseden. In addition, colorful images drawn from local folktales, like hundreds of invisible movies projected on the black screen of his imagination, further occupied Pema Tseden's childhood.

During this time, Pema Tseden frequently watched films in his village, which were organized by the Mobile Screen Team. Berry (2016:2) commented on this:

During the Mao era and into 1980s, when the film industry was state-owned and directed, these films depicted the 55 recognized minority nationalities of the PRC in ways that communicated the government's message about its policy toward them.

At a small hydropower station near his village, Pema Tseden had the opportunity to watch films that differed from those he saw in the village. One of the most memorable was *Modern Times* (Charlie Chaplin, 1936). All of the films were projected on a screen with a film projector operated by the station employees.

In many rural areas during the 1970s in China, there was often a lack of knowledge of events in the outside world. Pema Tseden's grandfather gave him a luxury - a small transistor radio - that became his best friend, enlivening the days he spent herding on the mountains. He was fascinated by the vivid characters conjured by sounds emanating from his little box. He was particularly spellbound by dramas. Pema Tseden told me, "The power of radio story telling strongly impacted me in my childhood. Now that I think about it, I never expected that those seemingly insignificant childhood incidents would impact my future career."<sup>1</sup>

After entering the Nationalities Middle School in Khri ka County, Pema Tseden was able to watch even more films each week that were organized by the school. He also used his pocket money to

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<sup>1</sup> Based on my interview with Pema Tseden in late May 2016 via WeChat.

go to the county town cinema every weekend. In three years of junior middle school, he estimated that he watched over 300 films. Watching films continued along his education journey from junior middle school in the county town, senior middle school in the prefecture town, and Northwest University for Nationalities in Lanzhou, Gansu Province.<sup>1</sup>

He studied Tibetan Language and Literature while at university and worked as a primary school teacher and a civil servant. He later studied at Beijing Film Academy, China's most prestigious film school, thus becoming the Academy's first ever Tibetan student (Asia Society 2010).

In 1991, Pema Tseden began composing literary works and was a well-known writer and novelist in Amdo before entering film school. "His short stories have appeared in the literary magazines such as *Light Rain*, *Mang tshogs sgyu rtsal* (Folk art and literature), and *Lho kha'i rtsom rig sgyu rtsal* (Lhoka literature and art)" (Virtanen 2008:252). He has written novels and essays in both Tibetan and Chinese, some of which have been translated into English, French, Japanese, Czech, and (Tibetan versions) Chinese. He also actively translates Tibetan to Chinese, for example, *Song of the Life* by Stag 'bum rgyal, which received the 2011 Minority Literary Award in Beijing. He has also translated selected Tibetan popular folktales into Chinese (Frangville 2016:11).

Pema Tseden began making films in 2006, while continuing to write. In Pema Tseden's *Grong khyer gyi 'tsho ba 'Life in Town* "we see a striking contrast in the way the relationship between the traditional and the modern is portrayed" (Virtanen 2008:253). Some elements of Pema Tseden's literary works are depicted in his films consequently, both his film and literary works share similarity in their interpretations of social change and its impact and meaning. In dealing in both literary and film productions, Pema Tseden crosses between the two worlds of "letters" and "images," representing Tibet's conflicts and bewilderments.

Much contemporary Tibetan literary and art work share a sense of losing rootedness in a time of rapid social change. Many writers,

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<sup>1</sup> Based on my interview with Pema Tseden in late May 2016 via WeChat.

including Pema Tseden, have left their rural homelands and dwell in towns and cities.

I go back home frequently, and sometimes I go back and stay there for a while. I have been living outside, mostly in Beijing, for many years now. When I consider my home, I see it through the lenses of an outsider, a bystander. It is inevitable, but that allows me a more objective, calmer perception.<sup>1</sup>

However, it seems difficult to return to one's roots in terms of the physic, inner world: "It's hard to return with real soul" (Pema Tsedan).<sup>2</sup> Along the journey farther away from "home" in a village to county town, to Lanzhou City, to Beijing, a multifaceted sense of identity also has become a general concern in his work.

When dealing with the question of what compels him to engage film, he said,

I have been inherently very interested in film since childhood.<sup>3</sup> ... There are so many Tibetan related films today, however, very few present real Tibetan life and reflect Tibetans' inner world. What non-Tibetan directors who never lived in Tibet usually see is on the surface, for example, landscape, customs, and so on. This is another motivation that encouraged me to make films (Feng 2015).

When I made similar inquiries during an interview, Pema Tsedan said:

Cinema is a burgeoning culture in Tibet so there is a lack of awareness. I hope by making films that I can promote this sprouting culture in Tibet. There are thousands of films coming out annually, however, it is very difficult to achieve a high artistic level. I'm trying hard to produce films that

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<sup>1</sup> <http://goo.gl/zW3FUW>, accessed 6 April 2016. What I present here is my abridged translation.

<sup>2</sup> <http://goo.gl/VCCDp8>, accessed 23 June 2014.

<sup>3</sup> <http://goo.gl/kpoZuL>, accessed in 2009.

can reach an international level based on Tibetan culture and exploration of movie art.<sup>1</sup>

## THARLO ཐར་ལོ།

*Tharlo* follows in the footsteps of Pema Tseden's *The Silent Holy Stones* (2005), *The Search* (2009), *Old Dog* (2011), and *The Sacred Arrow* (2014). *Tharlo* has attracted audiences both in China and internationally. Nominated for the Orizzonti section of the Venice Film Festival (2015), it was also nominated for four awards at the Golden Horse Film Festival in Taiwan, where it won the Best Adapted Screenplay Award.

*Tharlo* opens on a black screen to the accompaniment of melodious chanting of Chairman Mao's *Little Red Book*. Gradually, a man in his forties wearing a sheep-wool hat materializes. An orphan who does not know his exact age nor his real name, he has herded sheep on the mountains since childhood. He has been known as "Ponytail" since childhood. He can recite "Serve the People," a section from the *Little Red Book*, without a single mistake, which greatly impresses Rdo rje, a local policeman.

Rdo rje orders Tharlo to obtain an identity card from the local police station, but tells him to first go to the Bde skyid Photo Studio and have his ID photo taken. Tharlo then leaves his familiar pasture and heads for the town, where the photo studio proprietor recommends that he cross the road to a salon and have his hair washed in order to look his best in the ID photo.

G.yang mtsho, the hairdresser, is the first Tibetan woman with short hair Tharlo has ever encountered. While washing Tharlo's hair, she asks, "How many sheep do you have?"

"I have 375 sheep," Tharlo promptly replies.

G.yang mtsho slows her shampoo work, stares at Tharlo for a few seconds, and follows with, "How much are they worth?"

<sup>1</sup> Based on my interview with Pema Tseden in late May 2016 via WeChat.

Tharlo replies with details of the cash value of the sheep based on their sex and age. He concludes, "Probably they are worth 160,000 to 170,000 RMB."

Suitably impressed, G.yang mtsho tells him that he is more handsome with his now clean, long hair and adds, "I have short hair because I have been hoping to meet a long-haired, handsome man like you."

Tharlo takes fifty RMB from his pocket and hands it to her. G.yang mtsho says, "I can't change your money."

Tharlo says, "You don't need to give me any change," and abruptly leaves in an emotional upheaval. It is the first time a woman has told him that he is handsome.

Tharlo returns to the photo studio and has his picture taken. While waiting for the photograph to be printed, Tharlo revisits the hairdresser, who flatters, "You really are a handsome man," and invites him to a karaoke bar that night.

At the karaoke bar, G.yang mtsho sings, *It's My Destiny to Meet You*, a modern Tibetan song sung in Chinese, followed by *Leave the Mountains* sung in Tibetan.

After a few seconds of hesitation, Tharlo responds by singing a Tibetan love song.

G.yang mtsho expresses interest in love songs and Tharlo promises her he will learn more when they meet next time.

The next morning, Tharlo is drunk and lying in bed with G.yang mtsho. She declares that she no longer wants to stay in the town and suggests that they leave together for Lha sa, Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Hong Kong, or beyond.

Tharlo leaves. After delivering the ID photo to the local township police station, he drives back to the mountains on his motorcycle after purchasing a box of liquor and fifty firecrackers. In the mountains, Tharlo learns love songs, drinks heavily, and dreams of G.yang mtsho and the next time he can meet her and they can enjoy karaoke together.

While Tharlo is passed out from heavy drinking, many of his sheep are attacked and killed by wolves. Subsequently, Tharlo is

humiliated and beaten by the sheep owner's son, Sbyin pa. Intending to pick up his ID card in town and then leave with G.yang mtsho, he drives to town and gives her 160,000 RMB (US\$25,000). This represents his entire life savings on top of the proceeds of selling the sheep.

G.yang mtsho understands that Tharlo would only have this much money if he had sold the sheep. Imagining that men will soon be searching for him, she suggests he cut his long hair, so nobody will recognize him. Tharlo agrees and then this Tibetan Delilah cuts off his long hair.

That evening, Tharlo is eager to sing the love songs that he has learned on the mountains at the karaoke bar. G.yang mtsho, however, takes him to a party hosted by a locally famous singer. Tharlo gets drunk again that night.

The next morning, he finds himself alone on G.yang mtso's bed. With effort, he gets up and anxiously looks for his clothes. The frame shakes as music, suggesting panic, increases our sense of Tharlo's anxiety.

Tharlo searches for G.yang mtsho in every corner of the town - the karaoke bar, the photo studio, and the barber shop. She is gone. She has fled.

Unbalanced framing, natural light, a bumpy dirt road, a disordered street, and the continual noise of motors and construction activity create a sense of depression emphasizing the melancholy of Tharlo's inner world and the "civilizing" town.

*Tharlo* features scenes with deftly crafted color, lighting, modeling, props, performance scheduling, and sound. At the very beginning of the film, the director introduces the main character in a dramatic way. Tharlo recites "Serve the People," but we also hear something feeding in the opening scene. Gradually, a man in front of a slogan in large Chinese characters on a wall comes into view, as does a little lamb in the man's shoulder bag. We later learn that wolves killed the lamb's mother. As Tharlo finishes his recitation and as he turns to Chief Rdo rje, we notice a ponytail under his sheep-wool hat. During conversation, Tharlo feeds the little lamb from a small bottle taken

from his shoulder bag. The use of a sheep-wool hat, ponytail, the little lamb, and conversation with Chief Rdo rje powerfully communicate Tharlo's vocation and character.

Gradually, we realize that this is a black and white production indicative of Tharlo's world, a realm of only good and evil, emphasizing this journey from a state of *naïve*, pure trust and belief to the loss of identity, made even more poignant because the accompanying pain and suffering is self-inflicted.

In a few seconds, the director captures the transition of society and ways in which vulnerable individuals lose their identity in what at times seems an almost instantaneous transition from the traditional to being a "modern, civilized" global citizen. For example, while Tharlo is in the photography studio, a couple is taking a wedding photo. The background photo behind the couple changes - Lha sa... Beijing... New York City... - and the couple's clothes change from Tibetan robes to Western-style clothing. Bleating from Tharlo's bag draws their attention. They ask Tharlo if they can have a photo with his little lamb, and confide that they are former herders.

In this scene, the director seems to comment on how easy it is to enter and operate in a world of international modernity, regardless of our location, but how difficult it is to create an intimate relationship from pure, innocent hearts. This is the kind of relationship that Tharlo imagines he has achieved with G.yang mtsho, who then cruelly dupes him.

I want to particularly comment on a scene that visually illustrates the relationship between Tharlo and G.yang mtsho, the hairdresser. At the hair salon, numerous props are used to reference the characters within a certain space. For example, the entire dialogue between Tharlo and G.yang mtsho takes place in a mirror, suggesting that what is happening in the mirror is a sham because G.yang mtsho's sweet, insincere words hide her true purpose. The mirror is divided into two sections, suggestive of two different worlds. Tharlo is at the edge of the image while G.yang mtsho occupies the larger part of the space. Tharlo is on the lower side while G.yang mtsho is in a comparatively higher position than Tharlo, hinting at the inferiority

and superiority of the two characters, reflecting strength and weakness, domination and marginality.

How does the film express Tharlo's inner loneliness? There is no dialogue as Tharlo herds and while he is in his hut on the mountain. The use of firecrackers, a radio, sheep, a Tibetan mastiff, prayer flags, scarecrows that keep the wolves at bay, and the sounds of nature emphasize a world full of loneliness.

Tharlo thinks of G.yang mtsho while sitting woodenly as his sheep move forward, marginalizing him. From a vast wide angle, we only see Tharlo's back as he gazes at a place far beyond the mountains before him as wind buffets his heart and flutters the prayer flags by the hut.

At night before going to bed, Tharlo uses firecrackers to scare away the wolves, whose terrifying howls resound from the distant mountains as Tharlo smokes thoughtfully under the shimmering light of a small butter lamp. When he opens his hut door and comes out to light the firecrackers, a shining light from the open door pierces the darkness of the vast pasture. Tharlo walks some distance and then sets off the firecrackers. The ensuing rattle-tattle, vivid sparks in the black sky, and the barking of his Tibetan mastiff accentuate the silence of the pasture.

In his hut, Tharlo drinks and intently listens to love songs on the radio. He is intoxicated within the invisible space created by the love song lyrics and the liquor. When Tharlo drinks water from a bucket, the camera turns to the surface in front of him, displaying an inverted wavy image of Tharlo, insinuating his unstable mental world and what will likely happen.

Wolves attack and sheep die, including the little lamb - symbolic of Tharlo's unsullied inner world. This greatly distresses Tharlo, who had believed herding was a way to serve the people. He has now lost this sense of guiding obligation. As he boils flesh from the sheep killed by the wolves and then eats it, the beautiful thoughts he has of his lover and the great happiness it brings him conflicts with the cruel reality of losing his belief - the desire to "Serve the People."

At night after eating boiled meat, Tharlo gazes at a dark path in the mountains far beyond his back that is featured only in a wide-angle frame. After a few seconds, he gets up and lights a pile of dry grass. The subsequent light dances about as sharp, dark mountain winds whip the blaze. The crackle of the fire implies his eagerness to escape from the mountains, and provides further insight into his thoughts.

Indulgence in alcohol and smoking suggest weakness of character, creating a basis for ensuing events. Movement between the mountain and the township town indirectly illustrates the route of Tharlo's downward spiral.

At the very end of the film, Tharlo stops his motorcycle on a bridge under the snow-capped mountains along a long, zigzag road. He lights a cigarette, opens a bottle of liquor, and ponders. We only see a side profile of Tharlo. After a few minutes of drinking he smashes the bottle, takes out a firecracker from his shoulder bag, and lights it. The firecracker explodes. With a long, cold shot, the screen turns black, accompanied by a recitation of "Serve the People."

Concern for cultural identity and individual predicament are recurrent concerns in Pema Tsenden's calm, yet profoundly emotional films. Using a Tibetan character in *Tharlo*, the very nature of individual identity under the powerful, invasive wave of modern "civilization" and the sacrifices behind "development" are called into question. The heart of Tharlo's experience, sense of dislocation and loss, and longing for what modernity has to offer is familiar in other parts of the world, although perhaps expressed in somewhat different forms. *Tharlo* is thus a universal story, transcending boundaries between Tibetan and Chinese.

## THE SACRED ARROW གཡུང་མཛེས་ལྷོ་མཛེས་

Pema Tsenden has not only coped with the constraints of his creative situation, including the isolation of Tibet, political censorship, and the economic requirements of the cinematic form, but he has also

transformed them into powerful visual images of the isolated human psyche in its quest (Lo and Yeung 2016).

*The Sacred Arrow* is Pema Tseden's fourth film, following the path of his ambivalent exploration of tradition and modernity among contemporary Tibetans. *The Sacred Arrow* won an award for Best Cinematography at the 17<sup>th</sup> Shanghai International Film Festival (2014), and received recognition at various other international and national film festivals. Shot in Gcan tsha (Jianzha) County, Rma lho (Huangnan) Tibetan Autonomous, Mtso sngon (Qinghai) Province, *The Sacred Arrow* is set in A mdo, as are his previous films.

The film opens with a grand Tibetan-style melody hummed with a *ma rtse ma* 'tantric mantra' along with orchestral instrumental accompaniment as dim images move across a screen of *thang kha* murals related to Lha lung dpal gyi rdo rje (Pelgyi Dorje),<sup>1</sup> who fled from Dbus gtsang (U-Tsang) to A mdo after assassinating King Khri 'U'i dum brtsan (r. 841-842). The king had persecuted the "Sangha in central Tibet... during which he attempted to eradicate Buddhism in Tibet" (Blo rtan rdo rje et al. 2009:12). Images on the screen project Lha lung dpal gyi rdo rje, who:

fled on a white horse that had been colored black with charcoal, and wearing the black side of a reversible two-toned robe. Crossing a river, the horse was washed white, and Pelgyi Dorje reversed the robe to show the white side, thereby evading soldiers in pursuit (Mandelbaum 2007).

According to popular accounts, after reaching A mdo, he hid the bow and arrow at Lo rdo rje brag Cave and meditated. Later generations thrived and made an arrow commemorating the arrow used in the assassination.

The film then switches to a black screen that transitions to an archery competition between two groups of archers. The Lha lung group wears red shirts and the Mda' mo group wears white shirts. Both wear similar Tibetan robes and use traditional-style bows and arrows

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://goo.gl/KUcVKL> (accessed 31 July 2016) for more on Lha lung dpal gyi rdo rje.

in a vigorous rivalry emphasized by robust screaming as sunset lighting pierces the floating dust on the flat top of a mountain.

A local TV reporter in front of a camera reports on the annual final competition and the best two archers from each of two villages - Bkra don from Lha lung and Nyi ma from Mda' mo. After keen competition, Bkra don loses in a final round to Nyi ma, a calm, thoughtful man who is in love with Bkra don's sister, Bde skyid.

This is the second consecutive year that Mda' mo Village wins the contest. The shame of losing leads Bkra don to drink with his friends in a forest near Lha lung Village. Skal bzang rdo rje, Bkra don's brother, says he has damaged their village's reputation when he approaches them in the forest while they are drinking.

The archery competition between Lha lung and Mda' mo is part of local culture and has been maintained for centuries in a harmonious rivalry with little concern over which village owns the *gyang mda'* 'sacred arrow' from year to year. This year, however, Bkra don cares a great deal about the surface layer of the competition - reputation and prestige - than about the harmony and joy that traditionally undergirded the event. His deeply felt humiliation leads to numerous unfortunate consequences and propels the story forward.

That same night, villagers watch a film on the threshing ground. Skal bzang rdo rje arranges a competition to be held a month later for boys, hoping to regain honor for his village. Meanwhile, one of Bdra don's friends finds him and reports that Nyi ma and Bde skyid are having a romantic rendezvous in the forest. Bdra don mounts his motorcycle and speeds off. When he finds them, he is enraged.

Nyi ma says, "You lose and you act like this. Act like a man if you are one."

Bdra don replies angrily, "Did you just say I'm not a real man?"

Bkra don says, "You are like a dog."

"You are like a yak," Nyi ma replies.

Bdra don pulls a bottle of beer from his robe pouch and breaks it across Nyi ma's head. Beer suds cover Nyi ma's black hair and two lines of blood stream down his face.

Next morning, the villager chief and Bdra don's father take a sheep on their motorcycle to formally apologize according to the local custom, for Bdra don's behavior. Bkra don's father feels very guilty as he apologizes to Nyi ma's mother. Meanwhile, Nyi ma's father mentions Nyi ma and Bde skyid's possible marriage.

Bde skyid's father indicates agreement on the condition that they love each other. On the way back to their village, Bde skyid's father and the village head discuss the coming *lab tse*<sup>1</sup> ritual and '*cham* dance, and express concern over finding enough young men to participate, given that most young people are outside the village engaged in migrant labor.

Ensuing scenes show Lha lung archers cutting trees for the *lab tse* ritual and a brief introduction to making a good arrow is conveyed through conversation between Bdra don's father and his younger son, Skal bzang rdo rje. A competition between boys from the two villages is held in front of Lo rdo rje brag Cave. The competition ends in victory for Lha lung and humiliation for Mda' mo.

A humorous story is told while Dbra don's mother, Bde skyid, and daughter-in-law are baking traditional bread: a village girl brought a loaf of bread to an archery celebration. When it is discovered that it was discovered that it was not cooked through, it became a widely-told joke and the girl was never able to marry.

Lha lung Village's *lab tse* ritual take place on a nearby sacred mountain, a mountain deity is praised, *rlung rta* 'wind horses' are tossed into the sky, and participants scream and circumambulate the *lab tse* while led by a *sngags pa* 'lay tantric practitioner'. On the way back to the '*cham* dance from the *lab tse*, Bdra don arranges an archery contest with Nyi ma privately in a dense forest. He proposes they shoot

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<sup>1</sup> *Lab tse* refers to arrows and spears with flags attached inserted in heaps of stone atop mountain peaks in Tibetan areas. Origins of *lab tse* may trace to Tibetan soldiers making wooden frames for their weapons; Tibetan troops constructing such structures to signal control after occupying new lands; storage areas for weapons that mountain deities might utilize in battles; and sites where weapons were collected and put on striking summits in plain view to suggest a credible peace between tribes (Stuart et al. 1995, Xing 1992).

balloons among the trees while riding motorcycles. He promises if Nyi ma wins, he will not interrupt his marriage with his sister. Intense competition follows and Bkar don loses terribly.

As they compete, villagers impatiently wait for Bkra don to lead the '*cham* dance at the village temple. An awkward conversation ensues when Bkra don's arrives: "There are also certain steps. You can't just dance any which way. The deities won't be happy with that," he says.

"Father, so many rules! What century is it?" Bkra don replies.

While dancing, Nyi ma exits the temple, approaches Bde skyid in full view of the assembled villagers, gives her a ring, and says, "I'm going to marry you." This is a discomfiting moment. Tibetans in the area where the film was shot do not discuss romantic love between men and women in front of relatives, nor in public.

Suddenly, Bkra don appears in the frame. He is poised to shoot Nyima, who responds by notching an arrow and aiming at Bkra don. Villagers watch in shock and the space becomes very quiet. Thankfully, nothing happens.

That night, Lha lung villagers celebrate the *lab tse* and '*cham* dance rituals. A TV announcer informs that the winners of the next year competition will be awarded 30,000 RMB to promote and continue folk archery culture. The Lha lung village chief comments that an opportunity has come for the village to regain its prestige.

Lha lung archers then purchase modern bows and arrows without letting the other villagers know. When archers from Mda' mo see the modern bows their eyes register surprise and Nyi ma comments, "Times change. Our bows need to catch up with this decade."

Predictably, in the ensuing archery competition between "traditional" and "modern," Mda' mo loses.

Although Lha lung archers receive much praise for winning, they feel deeply guilty about winning with the unfair advantage brought by the modern bows.

In the afternoon, as Bkra don's family watches a TV report on the competition, the village chief arrives with news that the county town government is planning to host the first Sacred Arrow Cup

International Traditional Archery Invitational Tournament, has asked an archer from both Lha lung and Mda' mo to participate.

For days, Bkra don learns more about archery from his father, who explains that certain dance movements depicted in the *thang kha* illustrate the archery skills of Lha lung dpal gyi rdo rje who, as noted above, assassinated King Khri 'U'i dum brtsan while dancing 'cham, thus the 'cham dance became the origin of the archery festival and thrived in local communities.

One day, Bkra don climbs the rugged mountains to the cave and observes the painting very carefully, in a dark, tiny shrine lit by a butter lamp that brightens the dark shrine, illuminates his face, and lightens his inner heart. He practices the 'cham dance illustrated in the *thang kha* mural alone in the temple. The viewer then is taken to the stadium where competition proceeds according to modern rules, but in the absence of an enthusiastic audience, robust scream, and floating dust. In contrast, it is a covered stadium featuring limited space. Bkra don and Nyima earn equivalent marks and qualify for the Sacred Arrow Cup International Traditional Archery Invitational Tournament. They receive an enthusiastic welcome from residents of the two villages on the flat top of a mountain, who happily shout and circle in a beautiful sunset scene.

Soil/Earth plays a key role in the key protagonist's, Bkra don's, path to self-realization - from losing the peace and joy that comes from traditional rivalry, to abandoning the traditional bow, to picking up the traditional bow again.

Bkra don habitually takes a pinch of soil from the ground before he shoots an arrow. Soil is symbolic of rootedness and belonging. Before shooting an arrow in the stadium, he reaches down and touches the ground for a pinch of soil, but it is concrete. Feeling uncomfortable, he takes a bit of soil from a flower basin, suggesting that, the further a tradition is from its natal home, the less it retains of its original meaning.

Bkra don is in a silent dilemma, e.g., in the early morning of the second year's competition in drifting snow on a mountain slope, he grasps a traditional bow in this right hand and looks in the sky as snow

blows in his face and, maybe into his heart as well? Seemingly he is deliberating whether to use the traditional arrow during the next competition. In the event, he chooses a modern bow and arrow.

Within the past decade, Pema Tsenden has gained worldwide recognition for three feature films. *The Sacred Arrow* emulates the previous three in telling stories about contemporary Tibetans faced with conflicts that arise between maintaining tradition while dealing with the surging intrusion of modernity. *The Sacred Arrow* maintains Pema Tsenden's ambivalent tension between tradition and modernity. The film, however, departs from his previous films in terms of cinematic style. Many scenes in *The Sacred Arrow* follow the mainstream commercial cinema style with professional performers and "professionally" grand music.

From the first feature-length film to *Old Dog*, Pema's films feature a calmer exterior, but a more turbulent<sup>1</sup> interior. *The Silent Holy Stones*, for instance, tells the story of a young monk fascinated by a TV series adapted from the Chinese classic, *Journey to the West* (Frangville 2016:1). The use of long-takes and long shots in the course of the young monk's journey between his monastery to his home community for Lo gsar 'Tibetan New Year' and return to the monastery to participate in the Smon lam Festival contemplatively captures transitional moments of life in a colorless winter space.

In *The Search*, a film crew starts a painstaking journey looking for actors to perform in a film based on a famous play, *Dri med kun ldan*, of a prince who gives away all his property, and his wife, children, and his own eyes, to those who need them. In the course of the film crew's search in a four-wheel drive vehicle, they cross various Tibetan landscapes, including adobe compound farming villages, vast grasslands sprinkled with sheep, schoolyards full of students engaged in *sgor bro* 'circle dancing', monks in monasteries learning English from ABC, nightclubs frequented by college graduates, and illiterate performers in a Tibetan troupe in town.

*Old Dog* is a tale of conflict between a herdsman and his aging father centered on an old Tibetan mastiff. The old dog is important for

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<sup>1</sup><http://goo.gl/nDZxdC>, accessed 6 April 2016.

his spirit of dignity. Tibetan mastiffs are prized as pets by Chinese businessmen and the sale of a single mastiff might net untold riches. This translates into mastiffs being stolen for sale on the black market.

Blo chos's son, Mgon bo, secretly sells the dog to a Chinese dealer in the local town. Blo chos then goes to the town and reclaims the dog. This incident propels a chain of selling, stealing, and reclaiming the old dog, which becomes increasingly worrisome. Blo chos tries to save the old dog by designating the dog as *tshe thar*, which locally means it cannot be sold or used for profit. However, the dog is stolen by a local villager and then later discovered in the black market in the town. In reclaiming the dog, Mgon po fights the thief. Finally, unable to think of other solutions, Blo chos kills the dog that has been his faithful companion for years to liberate both the dog and himself.

The route to and from pasture and town is portrayed using mostly a fixed camera in natural light, zigzag dusty roads, depressingly grey skies, and endless sounds of construction. This creates a wordless depressing tone of culture in danger of disappearing.

Each of the above films is a journey in search of an answer. Pema Tseden said:

What I am doing is not to search for my origin or root but to contemplate and explore the future" [and except for *The Sacred Arrow*] ... They share the quality of promising completeness and stability by returning to the same point. Yet these promises are not realized (Berry 2016:8).

Along each journey in this marathon, modernity and tradition are depicted, while maintaining a neutral stance as an observer narrating the condition of contemporary Tibetans.

*The Sacred Arrow* seemingly leads to an optimistic resolution to explorations in meshing tradition and modernity, bringing the protagonists back to where they began. At the very end of the film, while Nyi ma and Bkra don stand in the "stadium" - a predictable representative metaphor for "modernity" - they hold their traditional bows and arrows in the same, single frame. Modern, government-sponsored competition now solves conflict.

Additionally, the way of cinematic storytelling is slightly different in *The Sacred Arrow*, as compared to Pema Tseden's previous films. Long takes and long shots are favored as the camera tends to stay back, keeping the various characters in the frame, establishing a distance. Although we follow certain characters, we are observing them rather than being drawn into identifying with the protagonists in the film (Berry 2016:12). Wide angle and long shots are frequently implemented in his previous films. As Pema Tseden said:

I wanted to create a calm visual style. A distance between the camera, the characters and the sets, so that ... the audience can make their own decision. Through the narrative development, the audience can choose to get involved. The environment the characters are in is more important than their facial expression. Within the settings, we reveal human relationship, reveal the plot, and reveal the human condition (Asia Society 2010).

Pema Tseden with the assistance of cinematographer, Luo Pan (*Ganglameiduo* 2008), utilizes intense close-ups that lead us to more closely identify with the characters in the film.

*The Sacred Arrow* also differs from Pema Tseden's earlier films in that, apart from the protagonist, played by TV comedian Sman bla skyabs in *The Search*, all performers in his films are non-professional. In contrast, *The Sacred Arrow* features such well-known performers as Bkra shis don grub (*Ganglameiduo* 2008); Bkra don from the Lha sa Drama Troupe; Bsod nams nyi ma, a model from Khams; Stobs rgyal (*Mountain Patrol* 2014, *Prince of the Himalayas* 2006; *No Man's Land* 2013); Blo bzang chos 'phel (Lopsang) (*Xiu Xiu: The Sent-Down Girl* 1998; *Prince of the Himalayas* 2006), and Bde skyid (*Taste of Tsampa* 2010).

Except for *The Silent Holy Stones*, Pema Tseden has not used strident soundtracks. He attempts to use diegetic sounds, avoiding the intrusion of the director's subjective perspectives. However, for *The*

*Sacred Arrow*, he invited Ricky Ho (*Warriors of the Rainbow: Seediq Bale* 2011) of Singapore to compose music.<sup>1</sup>

*The Sacred Arrow* is comparatively less circulated internationally, compared to his previous films. After a long journey marked by rivalry and conflict between the two villages, local officials find a solution. Conflicts are resolved in shouts of joy, amid beautiful images, and the resounding sound of an orchestra, reflecting government influence in film production.

The film's striking, orchestral soundtrack contributes to publicizing exotic Tibetan archery, local historic sites, and Gcan tsa's impressive scenery. The film will surely attract more tourists to the area where it was filmed.

The director arranged the protagonists to return to where their journey began. However, whether they truly return to the "village" and maintain a traditional form of archery and all that it represents - even with government support - is another question.

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<sup>1</sup> In 2011, Ho received the Best Original Film Music Award at the Taiwan Golden Film Festival for *Warriors of the Rainbow: Seediq Bale*. I believe this is the first work Ricky Ho did for a Tibetan film, which was obviously influenced by the *Himalaya* (directed by Eric Valli, 1999) soundtrack.

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#### NON-ENGLISH TERMS

'cham འཆམ།  
 a mdo ཨ་མདོ།  
 au dum btsan ཨུ་དུམ་བཙན།  
 banmadorji, pad ma rdo rje བཞུ་མདོ་རྩེ།  
 bde skyid བདེ་སྦྱིད།  
 Beijing 北京  
 bkra don བཀྲ་དོན།

blo bzang chos 'phel བློ་བཟང་ཆོས་འཕེལ།  
 bsod nams nyi ma བསོད་ནམས་ཉི་མ།  
 Chairman Mao, Mao Zedong 毛泽东  
 dbus gtsang དབུས་གཙང་།  
 dri med kun ldan འི་མེད་ཀུན་ལྡན།  
 g.yang phyug mtsho གཡང་ཕུག་མཚོ།  
 Ganglameiduo 冈拉梅朵, gangs lha me tog གངས་ལྷ་མེ་དོག  
 gcan tsha གཙན་ཙ།  
 gdugs dkar tshe ring གདུགས་དཀར་ཚེ་རིང་།  
 glang dar ma གླང་དར་མ།  
 gling rgyal གླིང་རྒྱལ།  
 grong khyer gyi 'tsho ba གྲོང་ཁྱེར་གྱི་འཚོ་བ།  
 Guangzhou 广州  
 Hodoyama Yiho, Chengshan Yifan 程山依凡  
 Hong Kong, Xianggang 香港  
 Huangchojia, dpal mchog rgyal དཔལ་མཆོག་རྒྱལ།  
 khri ka ཁྲི་ཀ།  
 klu rol ཀླུ་རོལ།  
 la zhi ba ལ་ཞི་བ།  
 lab tse ལབ་ཙེ།  
 lha lung ལྷ་ལུང་།  
 lha lung dpal gyi rdo rje ལྷ་ལུང་དཔལ་གྱི་རྡོ་རྗེ།  
 Lhasa, lha sa ལྷ་ས།  
 lho kha'i rtsom rig sgyu rtsal ལྷོ་ཁའི་རྩོམ་རིག་རྒྱུ་རྩལ།  
 Liu Fang 刘芳  
 lo sar ལོ་སར།  
 Luo Pan 罗攀  
 Lü Songye 吕松野  
 mang tshogs sgyu rtsal མང་ཚོགས་རྒྱུ་རྩལ།  
 mda' mo མདའ་མོ།  
 mdzo sna མཛོ་སྤ།  
 mkh' byams rgyal kha shem gyal མཁའ་བྱམས་རྒྱལ།  
 mtsho lho མཚོ་ལྷོ།  
 mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྒོན།  
 nyi ma ཉི་མ།

pema tseden, pad+ma tshe brtan པདྨ་ཙེད་པད་མ་ཙམ་བརྟན།  
 rdo rje རྡོ་རྗེ།  
 Ricky Ho, He Guojie 何国杰  
 rin chen don grub རིན་ཆེན་དོན་གྲུབ།  
 rlung rta རླུང་རྟ།  
 rma chu མ་ཚུ།  
 rma lho མ་ལྷོ།  
 sangs rgyas rgya mtsho སངས་རྒྱས་རྒྱ་མཚོ། / sangs rgyas rgyal mtsho སངས་རྒྱས་  
 རྒྱལ་མཚོ།  
 sbyin pa སྤྱིན་པ།  
 Shanghai 上海  
 skal bzang rdo rje སྐལ་བཟང་རྡོ་རྗེ།  
 sman bla skyabs སྐལ་བླ་སྐུབས།  
 Song Bing 宋冰  
 stag rtse don 'grub སྟག་རྩེ་དོན་འགྲུབ།  
 stobs rgyas སྟོབས་རྒྱས།  
 thang kha ཐང་ཁ།  
 tharlo, thar lo ཐར་ལོ།  
 tsampa, rtsam pa ཚུམ་པ།  
 Wang Xuebo 王学博  
 Wu Leilei 吴蕾蕾  
 zhi bde nyi ma ཞི་བདེ་ཉི་མ།

REVIEW: *RIVER*

Reviewed by Phun tshogs dbang rgyal (Independent Scholar)



Zon thar rgyal རོན་ཐར་རྒྱལ། (director and screenplay); Wang Meng 王 猛 (cinematographer); Stag rtse don 'grub ཐག་ཅེ་དོན་འགུལ། (artistic director); Gdugs dkar tshe ring གདུགས་དཀར་ཆེ་རིང་། (sound & music); Sangs rgyas སངས་རྒྱལ། and Alexandra Sun (producers); Pad ma tshe brtan པད་མ་ཆེ་བརྟན། and Du Qingchun 杜庆春 (co-producers); Kong Jinglei 孔劲蕾 (editor); and Rig 'dzin sgrol ma རིག་འཛིན་སྒྲོལ་མ།, Dbyangs can lha mo དབྱངས་ཚལ་ལྷ་མོ།, and Gu ru tshe brtan གུ་རུ་ཆེ་བརྟན། (performers). 2015. *Gtsang po* གཙང་པོ། [*River*]. Drama Films. 93.50 minutes. English subtitles.

Zon thar rgyal (b. 1974) is an A mdo Tibetan artist, cinematographer, artistic director, screenwriter, director, and filmmaker. He grew up in a herding area in 'Ba' (Tongde) County, Mtsho lho (Hainan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, China. Zon thar rgyal trained in the production of *thang ga*, a traditional form of Tibetan religious art. His major was Fine Arts while a student at Mtsho sngon Normal University. He later studied at Beijing Film Academy en route to becoming a prominent member of the first generation of Tibetan filmmakers.<sup>1</sup>

From 1994-2002 he was an artist, producing such works as *Life Series* and *Red Series*. In 2002, he began to make films including *Grassland* (2004) and *Flares Wafting in 1983* (2008). He also worked with Pad ma tshe brtan as a cinematographer and artistic director on

Phun tshogs dbang rgyal. 2017. Review: *River*. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 45:210-220.

<sup>1</sup> <https://goo.gl/teOBSV>, accessed 6 April 2016.

*The Silent Holy Stones*<sup>1</sup> (2005), *The Search* (2007), and *Old Dog* (2011).<sup>2</sup> Zon thar rgyal "became a member of the APSA [Asia Pacific Screen Awards] Academy when he was nominated for Achievement in Cinematography in 2011 for his work on *Old Dog*."<sup>3</sup>

His directorial debut, *The Sun Beaten Path* (2011), premiered at Locarno and won numerous awards including the Vancouver International Film Festival's prestigious Dragons & Tigers Award for Young Cinema and The 35<sup>th</sup> Hong Kong International Film festivals 2011-Special Mention Winner.<sup>4</sup>

*River*, the focus of this review, made its world premiere at the Berlin International Film Festival on 11 February 2015 and was shown at the 18<sup>th</sup> Shanghai International Film Festival on 28 May 2015. On 10 December 2015 in Lha sa, Zon thar rgyal showed *River* with his first film, *The Sun Beaten Path*. "The film has won more than 13 awards domestically and overseas since its completion."<sup>5</sup> As of March 2016, *River* was unavailable online and DVDs were unavailable for purchase.

*River* is the second film directed and written by Zon thar rgyal. It features non-professional Tibetan performers and all the dialogues are in A mdo Tibetan. It was shot in Mtsho lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture over a three-year period and features all the four seasons.

Zon thar rgyal says that inspiration for *River* came with the arrival of his second child (a son), which made his daughter very uncomfortable. "At first I just wanted to make a simple movie for children as a gift for my daughter,"<sup>6</sup> he said during an interview in Lha sa. Later, however, the film became more elaborate with the addition of a grandfather, creating a story that embraces three generations.

The main characters are the grandfather known as Thub bstan chos 'phel (monk's name) and Gsar brje skyabs (layman's name), played by Mkhas grub. Thub bstan chos 'phel was a monk until the Culture Revolution (1966-1976), became a layman, married, had a son,

<sup>1</sup> He was the associate cinematographer (person communication), 2016.

<sup>2</sup> <https://movie.douban.com/celebrity/1324493/>, accessed 12 April 2016.

<sup>3</sup> <https://goo.gl/scsCKL>, accessed 3 April 2016.

<sup>4</sup> <https://movie.douban.com/celebrity/1324493/>, accessed 5 April 2016.

<sup>5</sup> <http://tinyurl.com/zmg1zcz>, accessed 5 April 2016.

<sup>6</sup> <https://goo.gl/kFIjWS>, accessed 12 April 2016.

and then later left his family and became a meditator, living in a room fashioned out of a rocky mountainside in a remote location. Thub bstan chos 'phel is locally considered a holy, great meditator. When he falls ill, every family's representative visits, except for Gu ru.

I want to pause and comment on the name Gsar brje skyabs because it is such a clever choice. Not only does it reflect revolutionary names (I have a cousin (b. 1973), for example, named Gsar brje 'Revolution') of the Culture Revolution era, it is also packed with irony as used here. It translates as 'Protected by the Revolution'.<sup>1</sup> In fact, Thub bstan chos 'phel's life, like the lives of millions of others in China, was drastically altered by the Culture Revolution in ways they did not want and it is highly unlikely he felt that the Revolution protected him from anything.

The son, Gu ru (played by Gu ru tshe brtan), is in his thirties and hates his father because he refused Gu ru's dying mother's last wish, which was to see her husband.

Gu ru's wife, Rig sgrol (played by singer Rig 'dzin sgrol ma), is about the same age as Gu ru. Typically, she works hard, is constantly busy with housework, and shows flashes of fierce independence.

Dbyings can lha mo (real name), the youngest performer, is in the process of being weaned. Gu ru and Rig sgrol's only child, she is distraught when she learns that her mother is pregnant, believing that this is why she is being weaned. Dbyings can lha mo's constant playmate, Rgya khra 'Brown Variegated Lamb', is an orphan. She also has a yellow-brown teddy bear that her father buys for her. The teddy bear features prominently in the narrative when Rig sgrol tells Dbyangs can lha mo that no matter what she plants this year, there will be many of it the next year. Naïvely, she then plants the teddy bear in her family's field in the hope of growing more teddy bears by the next Spring.

...

The film begins with a black screen and the sound of a river that soon becomes the sound of a motorcycle engine. Gu ru, a drunk, dark-

<sup>1</sup> 'Gsar brje' = 'revolution'. 'Skyabs' = 'refuge' 'safe direction', <http://tinyurl.com/hxgeq6e>, accessed 7 April 2016.

complected man clad in a thick Tibetan robe sings while sitting behind a man on a moving motorcycle. They soon stop. While the driver gets off the motorcycle and urinates by the side of the road, Gu ru stands up and then unsteadily drives off.

The erstwhile driver comments to himself that driving while drunk is not a good idea, and then Gu ru falls. The other man runs to him, picks him up in his arms, and sees blood oozing from his injured face as Gu ru mumbles, "Four years. It's been four years. Should I go see him?"

The man says nothing.

We see the yellow teddy bear Gu ru bought for his daughter in his robe pouch.

...

Dbyangs can lha mo feels she does not get enough parental love and then begins to feel what love her parents do have for her is being lost when she realizes that her mother is pregnant. This realization is especially painful when Rig sgrol smears stove soot on her nipples.

Gu ru, who has not seen his father for four years, seems uncaring about his daughter's feelings, throwing "Get off!" "Go home by yourself!" "Stay there!" at her.

...

Several children play with Dbyangs can lha mo's teddy bear. They throw it into the sky and laugh joyfully, but Dbyangs can lha mo is unhappy because the other children will not let her play and do not return the teddy bear to her. She explains the situation to her mother, who says, "It doesn't matter. They'll return it after playing with it."

Dbyangs can lha mo returns to the children and tells them to return her teddy bear, saying three times, "I'm going to tell my mother."

The children ignore her.

Though the ground is still frozen, Gu ru moves to the summer pasture in late Spring, despite objections from Rig sgrol, who says that moving will entail a bumpy ride in a tractor trailer, which is bad for her, given her pregnancy. Gu ru is unmoved and tells her that if she does

not want to come, he will go and take their daughter with him. Rig sgrol then unhappily comes.

The day the family sets out, two children run after the tractor and throw Dbyangs can lha mo's teddy bear to her - a touching moment emphasizing children's sense of compassion.

The same night Gu ru's family reaches the summer pasture, a ewe is attacked and terribly injured by wolves. Gu ru kills it to put it out of its misery, leaving the ewe's lamb orphaned. Gu ru attaches a tit to a yak horn and uses it to feed the lamb. Dbyangs can lha mo pleads with her mother to give the lamb, Rgya khra, more milk and even filches milk from her mother's milk bucket so the lamb will have more.

The strong tie between the little girl and the lamb is emphasized in one scene in which Dbyangs can lha mo lies alone on the ground in her family's black-yak hair tent, looking at the sun shining through the tent's skyhole. Dbyangs can lha mo holds the horn used to feed the orphan lamb and swallows a bit of milk from the horn. Later, she ties her red hair string around Rgya khra's rope, murmuring, "You will be pretty after I tie my hair string to your rope."

Time passes, the lamb grows older, and one morning Gu ru puts Rgya khra with the flock, despite Dbyangs can lha mo's objections. That same day at dusk, Gu ru drives the flock home. Dbyangs can lha mo calls to Rgya khra many times, but the lamb does not appear. Despite her parents' insistence that she come for dinner, she refuses and leans on the fence, waiting. She does not return home until darkness falls.

Though Gu ru saw wolves killing Rgya khra, he hides this from his daughter and, the next day, takes Dbyangs can lha mo and pretends to search for Rgya khra (A mdo dialect: Rgya khya). Later, Dbyangs can lha mo finds the lamb's carcass close to a mountain deity altar near her home, her red hair string still on its carcass. Heavy with sadness, she heads home and does not talk for a long while.

One day, Rig sgrol sees her daughter lying on the ground near the tent and tells Gu ru, adding that a storm is brewing. Gu ru runs to her, his robe falling from his shoulders. Rig sgrol, obviously pregnant,

runs after Gu ru to her daughter. This scene, shot from a distance with an unmoving lens, emphasizes the parents' anxiety.

Gu ru makes three attempts to visit his father. Dbyangs can lha mo does not know that she has a grandfather till the day her father comes home and Rig sgrol scolds him because he did not call on his father, even though every other family in the local community sent a representative to visit. She feels humiliated and shamed because Gu ru is Thub bstan chos 'phel's son and has not shown filiality. While sobbing, she tells Gu ru that he should go see his father and prepares *rtsam pa* and bread for Gu ru to take to his father.

Gu ru and Dbyangs can lha mo mount Gu ru's motorcycle and head toward his father's meditation room. Gu ru has not been near his father's place for years and does not know the road very well. When they come to an ice-covered river, Gu ru tells his daughter to get off the motorcycle. She complies and walks across the ice to the other bank. Meanwhile the ice breaks, plunging Gu ru and the motorcycle into the frigid water. Gu ru scrambles out of the water and up onto the ice, removes his robe, and gives his daughter his *gzi* 'agate' and a package of cigarettes. He then returns to the motorcycle and unsuccessfully tries to pull it out of the water using his sash.

Fortunately, another man on a motorcycle comes and helps Gu ru get the motorcycle onto the ice. He also asks if they are going to visit Thub bstan chos 'phel.

Gu ru lies, saying he and his daughter are just visiting a local family. This angers Gu ru's daughter, who throws the agate and cigarettes onto the ice, and walks to a gully. She looks back to see if her father is following her. He is and she continues on.

In the next scene, we see Dbyangs can lha mo on the motorcycle behind her father. They proceed to the foot of a mountain and then see Gu ru's father's meditation room. Gu ru stops and tells Dbyangs can lha mo to go ahead and visit her grandfather. Dbyangs can lha mo does visit her grandfather, but does not take the *rtsam pa* and bread because it was soaked when the motorcycle fell into the river. They are now too heavy for her to carry.

The main reason Gu ru avoids seeing his father is the wounds on his face. He does not want his father to know that he hurt himself while he was drunk. Gu ru smokes, waiting for his daughter. When she returns, they mount the motorcycle and head for home. On the way, Gu ru stops the motorcycle and puts the *rtsam pa* and bread into a marmot hole.

Some days later, Gu ru takes his daughter and sets out for his father's meditation room. They stop by the marmot hole and retrieve the bag of bread, which is now moldy. Gu ru tosses the spoiled food into the nearby river and, not wanting to visit his father empty-handed, he and Dbyangs can lha mo return home.

Back at home, neither Dbyangs can lha mo nor Gu ru report exactly what happened to Rig sgrol, who assumes they visited her father-in-law.

Summer is coming. The frozen ground is warming. Other families in the community begin moving to the summer pasture.

One day, Dbyangs can lha mo is near the mountain deity altar not far her home. Two mischievous boys come and tease her. They say that Dbyangs can lha mo's father is a bad man who does not want his father.

Dbyangs can lha mo argues that her father is not a bad man, but the two boys keep repeating that he is until she cries and runs home.

Gu ru is fixing his motorcycle and asks what happened when he sees his daughter come home crying.

She ignores him, enters the tent, and loudly sobs to her mother that local children say her father is bad - a man who does not want to take care of her grandfather.

"No, your father isn't a bad man. Didn't you two go visit him?" Rig sgrol says gently.

The next scene is outside the tent. Rig sgrol is so upset that she wants to leave her daughter and husband. She feels humiliated and scorned by the community because her family does not visit Gu ru's father and do what local customs dictate - care for an ill elder.

Dbyangs can lha mo cries and begs her not to go as Gu ru drives his motorcycle in front of Rig sgrol and stops. She pushes him away

and he and his motorcycle fall to the ground. He stands up, gets back on the motorcycle, and explains that four years earlier when his mother was in the hospital, Gu ru begged his father to honor his dying mother's last wish but he refused. Rig sgrol now better understands Gu ru and embraces Dbyangs can lha mo, as Gu ru drives around them in circles, speaking loudly.

Gu ru now begins to consider forgiving his father.

Later, Dbyangs can lha mo and Gu ru visit Thub bstan chos 'phel in the County Hospital. The son suggests to his father that he stay in the hospital for some days, but Thub bstan chos 'phel refuses.

Dbyangs can lha mo leaves the hospital with her grandfather and Gu ru. All three get on the same motorcycle. As Gu ru gazes into a new mirror on his motorcycle, he notices that the wound on his face is healed. He also sees Dbyangs can lha mo sitting with her grandfather and talking. They head home and it seems that Gu ru has at last forgiven his father.

After some time, they come to a three-way intersection. One road is the one they are on, to the left is the road to their home, and the other road runs to the meditation room. The grandfather asks Gu ru to stop. He says that he wants to go to his meditation room. Instead, Gu ru suggests that he come home and convalesce for some days before returning to his retreat.

In response, Thub bstan chos 'phel and Dbyangs can lha mo get off the motorcycle. "My illness is not life-threatening and, even if it is, one must face death when it beckons. It is useless to resist!" Thub bstan chos 'phel declares.

Gu ru then leaves Dbyangs can lha mo with her grandfather on the road and heads home. However, it begins raining and he returns to find the little girl and her grandfather sheltering under a bridge. As soon as she hears Gu ru's motorcycle, Dbyangs can lha mo runs out and calls Gu ru to come join them.

Gu ru tells her to go back under the bridge and sit. He then faces the sky with closed eyes and ponders, seemingly forgiving his father. After the rain lets up, all three of them are again on the motorcycle, riding for home.

*River* ends happily. Dbyangs can lha mo no longer resents her mother for weaning her. She seems to understand this is due to her mother's pregnancy and accepts it. When she asks to see the new baby, Rig sgrol puts Dbyangs can lha mo's right hand on her belly and gazes at her with a satisfied, tender smile.

Dbyangs can lha mo, Gu ru, and Thub bstan chos 'phel are finally united, waiting for the river to become less turbulent. Thub bstan chos 'phel suggests to Gu ru that he remove his wet robe, but he does not listen. Dbyangs can lha mo and Thub bstan chos 'phel sit together on a big rock as Gu ru lies in front of them, supporting himself with his right elbow, looking to the east. Tears trickle from his left eye as he likely recalls his mother.

With a black screen, we hear Dbyangs can lha mo murmur into her grandfather's ear, "I'll bring many teddy bears next year when I visit you with the baby."

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Actors used their real names or short name forms, e.g., Rig sgrol/Rig 'dzin sgrol ma, and real names such as Dbyangs can lha mo. Moreover, Zon thar rgyal told me on WeChat that Mkhas grub was portraying events in his own life in *River*.

The film does have a few awkward moments. First, Gu ru's family gives milk to the orphan lamb, but where does it come from, given that the family has no yaks? Second, I was struck by the traditional Tibetan black yak-hair tent and the churn Rig sgrol used to make butter, which come across as unconvincing "Tibetan props," given the modern agricultural machinery (a large four-wheel tractor pulling a mechanical seeder) that Gu ru's family uses in their fields. A family that can afford to use modern farming machinery would likely not use a traditional churn because of the intense effort the latter requires. Instead, they would use an 'o 'khor milk separator.

I also wondered why Gu ru slaughtering the ewe in the traditional Tibetan way is featured, given the appeal the film will have for children.

From my experience, most Tibetan fathers have little discussion with family members about family affairs. Gu ru is typical,

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making decisions and telling his wife later, e.g., Gu ru decides to move to the summer place earlier even though the ground is frozen without talking it over with his wife. When Rig sgrol learns Gu ru's decision, she can only acquiesce.

Forgiveness is an important theme in this film. Some argue it is best to ignore those who do you harm because this is the result of karma; that you did the exact same thing to the person who has mistreated you. Consequently, revenge or recalling the abuse is meaningless. Dbyangs can lha mo finally forgives her mother and accepts the new baby. Gu ru stops hating his father. Thub bstan chos 'phel cannot forgive himself for becoming a layman but, in the end he does forgive himself for not visiting his dying wife. He believes that in doing this he could become a great meditator and that praying for her rather than visiting her was the right course of action.

All the actors wear ordinary clothing throughout, A mdo dialect is spoken in the film, and the actors realistically express human emotions in ways that are familiar to me. This gave me a "Tibetan" feeling, which I was glad to experience because there are few such films.

## NON-ENGLISH TERMS

'ba' rdzong འབའ་རྫོང་།

'o 'khor འོ་འཁོར།

a mdo ཨ་མདོ།

Beijing 北京

dbyangs can lha mo དབྱངས་ཅན་ལྷ་མོ།

Du Qingchun 杜庆春

gdugs dkar tshe ring གདུགས་དཀར་ཚེ་རིང་།

gsar brje skyabs གསར་བརྗེ་སྐྱམས།

gtsang po གཙང་པོ།

gu ru གུ་རུ།

gu ru tshe brtan གུ་རུ་ཚེ་བརྟན།

gzi གཙུག་།

Hainan 海南

Kong Jinglei 孔劲蕾

Lhasa, lha sa ལྷ་ས།

mkhas grub མཁས་གུབ།

mtsho lho མཚོ་ལྷོ།

mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྔོན།

pad ma tshe brtan པད་མ་ཚེ་བརྟན།

phun tshogs dbang rgyal ཕུན་ཚོགས་དབང་རྒྱལ།

Qinghai 青海

rgya khra རྒྱ་ཁྲ།

rgya khya རྒྱ་ཁྱ།

rig 'dzin sgrol ma རིག་འཛིན་སྒྲོལ་མ།

rig sgrol རིག་སྒྲོལ།

rtsam pa རུས་པ།

sangs rgyas སངས་རྒྱས།

stag rtse don 'grub ལྷག་ཅེ་དོན་འགྲུབ།

thang ga ཐང་ག།

thub bstan chos 'phel ཐུབ་བསྟན་ཆོས་འཕེལ།

Tongde 同德

Wang Meng 王猛

zon thar rgyal རོན་ཐར་རྒྱལ།

## REVIEW: *AMNYE MACHEN MOUNTAIN CIRCUMAMBULATION*

Reviewed by Bill Bleisch (China Exploration  
& Research Society)

subtitles in Chinese and English have been provided in different on-line versions.

The film begins with an introduction to the beliefs and practices that surround Amnye Machen, a sacred mountain located in the Amdo region, in what is now the south of Qinghai Province. Amnye Machen is considered one of the eight great holy mountains of Tibet and is held sacred as the holy abode of many Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, including Chakrasamvara 'Wheel of Perfect Bliss', as well as being the home of thirteen hunting deities of King Gesar. Tibetans traditionally undertake pilgrimage to Amnye Machen to pray at and trek around the mountain. Through one circuit of the circumambulation, the pilgrim is considered to gain merit equivalent to saying the mantra *Om Ma Ni Pad+me Hum* eight billion times, while circumambulation by prostration brings the merits of 100,000 prostrations.

Pilgrimage is undertaken to benefit not only the individual, but all sentient beings, and should be conducted in a spirit of deep faith, with an "ironclad focus of the mind with pure belief." As stated by Gonpo Lhachen in the film, "In order to eliminate the sufferings of beings in the six classes of transmigration, we must understand the idea of obtaining the positive path of transmigration by circumambulation."

Amnye Machen symbolizes the body, speech, and mind of Chakrasamvara. The Year of the Horse is particularly significant for the body of Chakrasamvara and, therefore, for Amnye Machen. The merit gained through a pilgrimage to Amnye Machen increases thirteen or eighteen times in the Year of the Horse.

The second half of the film considers the relationship between pilgrimage practices and environmental protection. Tsering Bum points out that, in Tibetan cultural practices surrounding mountain deities, there is no separation between humans and nature, which is in striking contrast to the consideration of nature as a source of materials, something to be conquered and exploited. Despite this, road building and earth mining near the mountain, as well as litter from an ever-increasing number of pilgrims, have brought modern problems to

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Amnye Machen. Gonpo Lhachen delivers an impassioned call to all Tibetans to work tirelessly to protect Amnye Machen from environmental damage.

While the film primarily deals with Tibetan beliefs and practices, a few minor inaccuracies can be pointed out, such as the statement that the most auspicious year for pilgrimage to sacred Mount Kawakarpo is the Year of the Horse. In fact, for that mountain in southern Kham, it is generally considered to be the Year of the Sheep. As another instance, the year by year decrease in snow and ice cover around Amnye Machen is blamed on dust from local road construction and mining activities. The loss of snow cover, however, probably has more to do with distant activities. Deposition of soot ("black carbon") on glacier ice and snow may be increasing their absorption of heat from the sun.

Anthropogenic global climate change is causing increasingly high average and peak temperatures on the high Tibetan Plateau. Most of the black carbon probably arises from distant industry and field waste burning, and global climate change is the result of carbon emissions, not local activities. There is little that pilgrims and local government can do about these long-distance effects of human activity. Nevertheless, restricting use of coal fires and diesel engines around the mountain would be a concrete action that could be taken to protect the mountain's snow and ice. Contributing a voice to the global campaign to combat denial of the responsibility of carbon profligate nations in the developed world, especially the USA, would be another concrete action to which viewers of this film could contribute.

Overall the film should do well in achieving its stated goals, and we hope that it gets a wide audience, as it is freely available on the internet, both outside of China and within. As Tsering Bum points out in the film, circumambulation is an important way of preserving cultural heritage and of cultivating healthier attitudes towards the environment.

Gonpo Lhachen gives the final call to action: "Amnye Machen is a sacred mountain deity for all Tibetans. We must protect it."

## NON-ENGLISH TERMS

Amdo, a mdo ཨ་མདོ།

Amnye Machen, a myes rma chen ཨ་མྱེས་མ་ཆེན།

Chakrasamvara, dpal 'khor lo sdom pa, དཔལ་འཁོར་ལོ་སྒྲུབ་པ།

Dorjeebum, rdo rje 'bum རྡོ་རྗེ་འབུམ།

Ganglha, gang lha གངས་ལྷ།

Gesar, ge sar གེ་སར།

Gonpo Lhachen, mgon po lha chen མགོན་པོ་ལྷ་ཆེན།

Kawakarpo, kha ba dkar po ཁ་བ་དཀར་པོ།

Kham, khams ཁམས།

kora, skor ra སྐོར་ར།

Nyangchakja, snying lcags rgyal སྙིང་ལྷགས་རྒྱལ།

Nawang Khechog, ngag dbang mkhas mchog སག་དབང་མཁས་མཆོག།

Nyangtak Gyal, snying stag rgyal སྙིང་སྟག་རྒྱལ།

Om Ma Ni Pad+me Hum ཨོཾ་མ་ཎི་པད་མེ་ཏཱ།

Qinghai 青海, mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྔན།

Tashi Dorje, bkra shis rdo rje བག་ཤིས་རྡོ་རྗེ།

Tsering Bum, tshe ring 'bum ཆེ་རིང་འབུམ།